A HERO OF LIÉGE

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THE SPY UNMASKED

A HERO OF LIÉGE

A STORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

HERBERT STRANG

ILLUSTRATED BY CYRUS CUNEO

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BROWN OF MOUKDEN: A STORY OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR.

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CHAPTER I--THE OPENING OF THE GAME

At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, August 4, Kenneth Amory walked into the private office of the head of the well-known firm of Amory & Finkelstein, gutta-percha manufacturers, of Cologne. Max Finkelstein, the head of the firm, swung round on his revolving chair, moved his hand backward over his brush-like crop of brownish hair, and looked up through his spectacles at Kenneth, his stout florid countenance wearing an expression of worry.

"I sent for you to tell you to pack up and get away by the first train," he said, in German. "Things are looking very black; the sooner you are home, the better."

"Our dear Max is jumpy," came in smooth tones from the third person in the room, the ends of his well-brushed moustache rising stiffly as he smiled. He was tall and slim--a contrast to his cousin Finkelstein, who had reached that period of life when good food, a successful business, and Germanic lack of exercise, tend to corpulence. "I tell him he need not worry," the speaker went on. "It will be as in '70."

"Provided that England----" Finkelstein was beginning, but Kurt Hellwig broke in with a laugh.

"Oh, England! England will protest a little, and preach a little, and take care not to get a scratch."

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Kenneth, rather warmly.

"No? You think otherwise?" Hellwig was smiling still. "Well, we shall see. Perhaps you have private information?"

His mocking smile and ironical tone brought a flush to Kenneth's cheeks.

"I don't want any private information to know what England will do," cried the boy.

"True, the public information is conclusive. England is helpless; she suffers from an internal complaint; she is breaking up."

"That will do, Kurt," said Finkelstein, anticipating an explosive word from Kenneth, who was quick-tempered, and apt to fall out with Hellwig. "Really, Ken, you will be safer at home, and if you don't go now you will lose your chance; all the trains will be required for the troops."

"I'd rather wait a little longer," replied Kenneth. "It's all so interesting. I've never seen a mobilisation before."

"It will do him good to see how we manage things in Germany," said Hellwig. "And since England will remain neutral, he will run no risk."

Finkelstein, easygoing and indolent where business was not concerned, yielded the point.

"Very well," he said. "Do as you please. But I recommend you to pack up in readiness for a sudden departure. For my part, I hope Kurt is right; I think of my business."

"We all think of our business," said Hellwig, with a slight stress upon the pronoun.

"Our business--yes," said Finkelstein. "We shall all suffer, I fear. But if it is as in '70----"

Kenneth did not wait to hear further discussion on the chances of the war. Remarking that he would see the others at lunch, he hurried away into the street. Awakened very early that morning by the rumbling of carts and the tramp of horses, he had got up and gone out, to watch the continual passage of regiments of infantry and cavalry, batteries of artillery, pontoon trains, commissariat and ammunition wagons, through the streets and the railway station. Everything was swift and systematic; the troops, though a little hazy as to their destination, were in high spirits; the war would soon be over, they assured their anxious friends.

It was all very new and exciting to Kenneth Amory, who had only vague memories of the English mobilisation for the South African war, when he was a child of four. His father had founded, with Max Finkelstein, an Anglo-German business which had attained great dimensions. Finkelstein controlled the German headquarters at Cologne; Amory looked after things in London. The latter died suddenly in the winter of 1912, leaving his son Kenneth, then nearly seventeen years of age, to the guardianship of Finkelstein, in whom he justly placed implicit confidence.

Since then Kenneth had spent much of his time in Germany, learning the business under Finkelstein's direction. He had a great liking for his father's partner, who was a keen man of business, scrupulously exact in his duties as guardian, and a "good fellow." Finkelstein had announced that Kenneth, as soon as he came of age, would be taken into partnership. The firm would still be Amory & Finkelstein.

When Kurt Hellwig spoke of "our business," his use of the first personal

pronoun must be taken to have implied a commendable feeling: he had no actual share in the business. His connection with it was a proof of his cousin Max's kindness of heart. Hellwig had brilliant abilities; in particular, remarkable linguistic powers; but he had never been able to turn them to account in the various careers which he had successively attempted. Finkelstein had more than once lent him a helping hand; since Mr. Amory's death he had employed him as occasional representative in England. Needless to say, he did not entrust any matter of importance to his erratic cousin; and the salary he paid him was proportionate rather to relationship than to services.

Kenneth returned to Finkelstein's house for the midday lunch. Neither Finkelstein nor Hellwig was present.

"Father sent word that he was detained," said Frieda, Finkelstein's daughter, a little younger than Kenneth. "We are not to wait for him."

"He seemed very worried when I saw him this morning," said Kenneth. "Of course business will be at a standstill, especially if we come into the war."

"It will be hateful if you do," said the girl. "But you won't, Kurt says. We have done nothing to you."

"Kurt knows nothing about it. He thinks we are afraid to fight. He's wrong. Of course we are not concerned with your quarrel with Russia; but when it comes to your attacking France, quite unprovoked, and bullying Belgium to let you take the easy way, you can hardly expect us to look on quietly. But we won't talk about that, Frieda; you and I mustn't quarrel."

Frieda and Kenneth were very good friends. One bond of union between them was a common dislike of Kurt Hellwig, whose sarcastic tongue was a constant irritant. Kenneth related what had passed at the office that morning.

"Why has he come back?" said Frieda. "He has been away for weeks; I wish he would stay away altogether."

"Do you?"

"Of course I do. What do you mean?"

"I fancy Kurt thinks you admire him--because he wants you to, I suppose."

"Will you take me to Cousin Amalia's after lunch?" asked Frieda, with a disconcerting change of subject. "I promised to spend the rest of the day with her. And you'll fetch me this evening, won't you?"

After escorting Frieda to her cousin's, Kenneth strolled about, watching the war preparations, then turned homewards to pack his bag, as he had promised Finkelstein to do. On the way he bought a copy of the *Cologne Gazette* containing a mangled version of Sir Edward Grey's speech in the House of Commons on the previous day. When he had finished packing, he sat down with the paper at the open window of his room. Having risen early, he was rather tired, and the heat of the afternoon soon sent him to sleep.

He was wakened by voices near at hand. There was no one but himself in the room; after a moment's confusion of senses he realised that the sounds came up from the balcony beneath his window. It was reached from the drawing-room, and since it was shaded by a light awning, someone had evidently gone there for the sake of fresh air.

The awning concealed the speakers from Kenneth's view, but in a few moments he recognised Hellwig's voice. The other speaker was a man and a stranger. Kenneth at first paid no attention to them; Hellwig had many acquaintances, and was fond of entertaining them. But presently he caught a sentence that made him suddenly alert.

"The bridge has been mined."

It was the stranger speaking, in German. Kenneth rose silently from his chair, and leant out of the window, so that he should not miss a word.

"The train can be fired at any moment, thanks to our forethought in tunnelling between the mill-house and the bridge."

"That is well," said Hellwig, in the tone of a superior commending the report brought him by a subordinate. "Get back as quickly as you can, and tell them to be ready to act instantly on receipt of a marconigram."

"The stations are closed to private messages," remarked the visitor.

"Yes: but mine will get through. What news have you?"

"When I left yesterday the Belgians were becoming alive to their danger. They are mobilising feverishly. The forts at Liége are fully manned. But many people refuse to believe that we shall go to extremes and invade their territory. They say that its inviolability is guaranteed by treaty."

Hellwig laughed.

"Keep in touch with London," he said. "In a few hours I shall be cut off from London except through Amsterdam, and I shall have to move my headquarters there. You remember the address?"

"As before?"

"Yes. Send there any information that comes through from London, and keep me informed of your whereabouts."

"There was talk, as I came through, of possible English intervention. I learn that crowds clamoured for war in front of Buckingham Palace last night."

"A mistake: they were shouting against war. The British government will not dare to strike: even if they do, they will be too late. We are ready: they are not. Before they have made up their minds we shall be across the Belgian frontier and into France."

The conversation continued for a few minutes longer, then the visitor rose to go. Acting on impulse, Kenneth ran out of his room, and was nearing the foot of the staircase as the two men came from the drawing-room. He had the *Cologne*

Gazette in his hand.

"Have you read Sir Edward Grey's speech?" he asked Hellwig.

"Not yet. Is it worth the trouble?" replied Hellwig in his smooth mocking tones.

"I thought you hadn't, or you wouldn't be so cock-sure," Kenneth returned. "I rather think the British government have already made up their minds."

"So you have been eavesdropping?" said Hellwig quickly.

"You are a spy!" cried Kenneth--"you and your friend."

"Is that any concern of yours?"

"Only to this extent; that I'll have nothing more to do with you," said Kenneth hotly, conscious at the moment that it was a foolish thing to say, and feeling the more irritated.

"That will kill me," sighed Hellwig.

"And Max shall know it," Kenneth went on. "He doesn't know that you've been up to this sort of thing, I'm sure."

"Certainly; Max shall know that I am doing something for my country. You are, no doubt, doing wonders for yours."

"I wouldn't do such dirty work as yours," cried Kenneth, more and more angry under Hellwig's calmness.

At this moment the outer door opened, and Frieda came in from the street.

"What is the matter?" she asked, looking from Kenneth's flushed face to Hellwig's smiling one, upon which, however, there flickered now a shade of embarrassment.

"The fellow is a spy!" Kenneth burst out.

"I was explaining, my dear cousin, that I am doing at least something for my country," Hellwig said.

"We should have preferred that it were anything else," said Frieda coldly. "Come, Ken, I've something to say to you."

She hurried along the corridor, not heeding Hellwig's bow as she passed. Kenneth followed her. Hellwig shrugged, and left the house with his friend.

"How did it come out?" asked Frieda, when Kenneth was alone with her in the drawing-room.

"They were talking under my window. He accused me of eavesdropping. I couldn't help hearing them at first; and when I found out what they were at, of course I listened. You have come back alone?"

"Yes. I met Father. He says that your government has sent us an ultimatum, and war is certain. You must go home at once. Father sent me to tell you."

"All right. He sneered about my doing wonders for my country. I'll do something better than spying. I'll volunteer for the Flying Corps."

"Oh, don't do that! It's so dangerous."

"No more dangerous than being in the firing line."

"But why do anything at all--of that sort, I mean? War is horrible--horrible!"

"It is, for everyone. I'm sure none of our people wanted it. But if we're in for it, every fellow who can do anything will be required, and you wouldn't wish me to skulk at home while others fight?"

"I'd rather you should fight than spy. You must make haste. Martial law is proclaimed. Father called at the station, and found that there will be a train at half-past nine to-night: it will probably be the last. And the stationmaster said that anyone who wanted to secure a seat must be early, for there's sure to be a great rush. Have you done your packing?"

"Yes; there's only one bag I need take. The less baggage the better. I'll run down to the station and get my ticket now, to make sure of it."

"Don't be long. Father will be back to dinner, and he wants to say goodbye to you, and to give you some messages for business friends in London."

Kenneth hurried to the station. There were signs of new excitement in the streets. Newsvendors were shouting that Belgium was invaded. People thronged the beer-shops, eagerly discussing the situation. Already there were cries of "Down with the English!" Tourists of all nationalities were flocking to the station and to the landing-stage for the Rhine steamers. Soldiers were everywhere.

At the station ticket office there was a long queue of people waiting. Kenneth saw little chance of obtaining a ticket for some time; but being well acquainted with the stationmaster, he sought his assistance and was provided with a written pass.

"I can't guarantee that you will get beyond Aix-la-Chapelle," said the official. "You must take your chance."

Kenneth set off to return. Attracted by a crowd at the door of one of the hotels, he went up to discover the cause of the assemblage. A mountain of luggage was piled on the pavement, and the distracted owners, turned out of the hotel, were vainly seeking porters to convey it to the station. The riff-raff of the streets were jeering at them. Kenneth turned away, feeling that the scene was ominous.

He had walked only a short distance from the spot when a hand touched his shoulder from behind.

"You are under arrest, sir," said a police sergeant, who was accompanied by two constables.

"Nonsense," said Kenneth, good-humouredly. "You have mistaken your man."

"Your name is Kenneth Amory?" said the sergeant.

"Something like that," said Kenneth, amused at the man's pronunciation.

"There is no mistake, then. You are arrested."

"Indeed! On what charge?"

"As a suspect."

"Suspected of what?"

"Of spying."

This took Kenneth's breath away. Mechanically he walked a few steps beside the officer, the two constables following. Then realising the nature of the charge against him, he stopped short.

"It is false!" he cried. "I am no spy. Where is your warrant? What right have you to arrest me?"

"No warrant is needed," replied the sergeant, courteously enough. "You will no doubt clear yourself if you are innocent."

"Of course I am innocent. My friends will prove that. Oh! I won't give you any trouble: the sooner I get to the police-station, the better."

"That is reasonable," said the sergeant.

They marched on. Kenneth looked eagerly at all the passers-by in the hope of finding a friend who would vouch for him; but he recognised no familiar face. On reaching the station he was searched, but deprived of nothing except his pocket-book and the letters it contained.

"They are only private letters," he explained. "The whole matter is ridiculous. You will let me write a note to a friend, who will speak for me?"

"Certainly," said the officer, "provided I see what you say."

Kenneth quickly scribbled a note to Max Finkelstein, and handed it to the officer, who remarked that it had nothing suspicious about it, and placed it in an envelope which Kenneth addressed.

"I shall be released as soon as Herr Finkelstein comes?" asked Kenneth.

"That is doubtful," replied the officer. "It will probably be necessary to bring you before the magistrate to-morrow."

"But I am going to England to-night."

"To England! That is suspicious. Herr Finkelstein may have influence. We shall see."

A short conversation, carried on in low tones, ensued between the sergeant and his superior officer. They were consulting as to where the prisoner should be placed: the cells, it appeared, were full. Ultimately Kenneth was taken to a room on the ground floor. The window was barred and shuttered on the outside, and light entered only by two small round apertures in the shutters.

"A black hole, this," he said to the sergeant.

"It will not be for long, if you are innocent," replied the man.

Then he shut and locked the door; Kenneth was left to himself.

CHAPTER II--THE FIRST TRICK

With the door shut, the room was almost wholly dark. It contained no furniture but a plain deal table and a wooden chair. Kenneth sat down and ruminated. His position was annoying, but also mildly exciting. It would be something to tell his people when he got home, that he had been arrested as a spy.

It was now five o'clock. Dinner was at seven: his train left at half-past nine, and the stationmaster had advised him to be at the station at least an hour in advance. He had addressed his note to Finkelstein at the office, and expected that his friend would arrive within half an hour or so and procure his release. In the absence of any evidence against him a prolonged detention would surely be impossible.

Perhaps half an hour had passed when he heard footsteps on the passage; the key turned in the lock, and he started up, expecting to see Finkelstein. But there entered a constable, bringing a mug of beer and a piece of rye bread.

"My friend Herr Finkelstein has not come?" Kenneth asked.

"Nobody has come for you," replied the man.

"My note was taken to him?"

"If you wrote a note, I daresay it was."

"Aren't you sure?"

"I have only just come on duty, sir."

The constable set the food on the table and went out, locking the door.

Anticipating dinner, Kenneth was not tempted to eat the coarse fare provided. He was still not seriously alarmed, though his annoyance grew with the passing minutes. Finkelstein never left his office until half-past six; there was plenty of time for him to have received the note--unless there had been delay in delivering it. This possibility was somewhat perturbing.

Kenneth began to wonder what had led to his arrest. He was quite unknown to the police; nothing in his appearance was aggressively English. So far as he

knew he had no enemy in Cologne, so that it seemed unlikely that anyone had put the police on his track out of sheer malice.

His thoughts reverted to the incident of the afternoon. The discovery that Hellwig was in the German secret service, surprising as it was, made clear certain things that had puzzled him. During his frequent visits to London, Hellwig was accustomed to stay at the Amorys' house, and had many callers who came to see him privately, on the firm's business, as Kenneth had supposed. It seemed only too probable now that they were agents in the work of espionage.

A sudden suspicion flashed into Kenneth's mind. Was it possible that his arrest was due to Hellwig? From what he had overheard it was clear that Hellwig was a man of considerable authority in the secret service. A word from him would no doubt suffice. But what could his motive be? Kenneth was under no illusion as to the man's character. He had always thoroughly disliked and distrusted him, and felt instinctively that the dislike was mutual. Could it be that Hellwig, knowing himself discovered, and fearing that Kenneth, on his return to London, would inform the authorities, had taken this step to save himself? It seemed an unnecessary precaution, for if war broke out between Britain and Germany, Hellwig would make no more journeys to London for some time to come.

The more Kenneth thought over the matter, the more convinced he became that Hellwig, whatever his motive might be, had caused his arrest. The conviction destroyed his confidence in an early release. The man would stick at nothing. He would have foreseen an application to Finkelstein, and taken steps to forestall it. What if the note should never reach Finkelstein?

Kenneth was now thoroughly alarmed. The Germans had a short way with spies, or those they regarded as spies, even during peace; it was likely to be shorter and sharper than ever on the outbreak of war. The prospect of being taken out and shot sent cold thrills through him.

Contemplating this dark eventuality he heard heavy footsteps overhead. He looked up, and for the first time saw a glint of light from the ceiling in one corner of the room. The footsteps passed: all was silent again.

Kenneth sat thinking. If his suspicions were well founded, he felt that his doom was sealed. It would be easy for a man like Hellwig to fabricate evidence against him. In default of Finkelstein's assistance, which Hellwig would take care to prevent, his only means of safety lay in flight. But what chance was there of escaping from this locked and shuttered room? An examination of the window showed the hopelessness of it.

The faint streak of light above again attracted his notice. Noiselessly drawing the table beneath it, he mounted to examine its source. A portion of the plaster had fallen away from the ceiling, and the light filtered through a narrow crack in the flooring above. This discovery, under pressure of circumstances, gave him a

gleam of hope. Taking out his pocket knife, he began to scrape quietly at the plaster, gradually enlarging the hole. What there might be above he could not tell; judging by the passing in and out of the footsteps the room was unoccupied.

While he was engaged on this work he heard steps in the passage without. Springing down, he swept on to the floor, and under the table, the plaster he had scraped from the ceiling, then stood waiting eagerly. Perhaps it was Finkelstein at last.

The door opened. A man was thrust into the room, and the door again locked. The newcomer swore.

"You're an Englishman?" cried Kenneth.

"Do I find a companion in adversity?" said the man. "We can condole."

"Who are you?"

"What is your father? How many horses does he keep? Bless me, how this reminds me of my innocent childhood! 'More light,' as Goethe said. But I can see well enough to know that you are a youngster. Sad, sad!"

Peering at the stranger, Kenneth saw a man of about thirty-five, with hair *en brosse*, Germanic moustache, and a German military uniform.

"I should pass in a crowd, one would think," the man went on, smiling under Kenneth's scrutiny. "But Fate is unkind."

"You are a spy?" said Kenneth.

"And you, my friend?"

"No. They say so, but I'm not."

"They say so, and they will have their way. Ah, well! They say also, that it is a sweet and comely thing to die for one's country. I always thought I should die in my boots."

"Can they prove it against you?"

"A scrap of paper! They can't read it, but what matters that? A note in cipher is evidence enough. But I shall not die unavenged: they are crying in the streets that war is declared, and I fancy that Emperor William has bitten a little more than he can chew. What brings you to this deplorable extremity?"

"I don't know: a private enemy, I think."

"Well, the rain falls on the just and the unjust. I'm sorry for you. Haven't you any friend, though, who can get this door unlocked?"

Kenneth explained briefly what had happened. Then, feeling a strange liking for his companion, he added:

"When you came in, I was wondering about the chances of escape."

"A waste of brain tissue, unless you have some talisman. But tell me, you have some definite idea?"

"You see that hole in the ceiling? I was enlarging it."

"Ha! A man of action! Nil desperandum, eh? Let me have a look at it."

He mounted on the table, and thrust his hand into the opening.

"I say, youngster," he said, a note of eagerness in his voice, "there is a chance, on my life there is. The boards above are not over firm. We may be skipping out of the frying-pan into the fire, but one can only die once. Continue with your work; I'll mount guard and warn you of anyone approaching."

Kenneth scraped away with his penknife, until the hole was large enough to admit his head and shoulders. The light, coming through a single crack, did not increase, so that the enlargement of the hole might easily escape notice if a constable entered. The stranger put the chair on the table.

"Mount on that," he said; "put your back against the boards, and shove--gently."

Kenneth did as he was instructed. The pressure of his back started the nails, and a plank rose, with an alarming creak.

"That won't be heard through the rumble of traffic outside," said the man. "Wait a little. You don't know anything of the room above?"

"Nothing. I heard somebody go in and out a while ago; I think it is empty."

"Well now: let us keep cool. We can get into the room: that is certain. Can we get out of it? We shall have to descend the stairs. Our chance of life depends on one half-minute. 'Can a man die better than facing fearful odds?' Look here: we'll toss. Heads: we'll go up; tails--why, hang it, we'll still go up! Fortuna fortibus! Wait till we hear the rumble of the next artillery wagon; then! ..."

They had not long to wait. Heavy traffic passed at short intervals.

"Now!" said the stranger.

Kenneth gave a heave. In a moment two planks were removed. Resting his arms on the edges of those on either side of the gap, he hoisted himself up. His companion quickly followed. They stood in the room.

The next half minute was filled to breathlessness. It was a bedroom. A street lamp outside threw a little light into it. Hanging from a peg on the door was a policeman's tunic and helmet.

"Fortune's our friend," murmured the stranger.

In ten seconds he had helped Kenneth to don the uniform. They crept out of the room, and peeped over the stair rail. The way was clear. All sounds within were smothered by the noise in the street. They stole downstairs, past the closed door of the guardroom, through the outer door, and into the open. "War with England!" shouted a newsman at the corner.

"We win the first trick!" chuckled the stranger, as they hurried along.

CHAPTER III--THE SECOND TRICK

"The first trick--yes: but what are trumps?" said Kenneth, in reply to his companion's remark.

"Toujours l'audace!" the stranger answered. "But my life isn't worth a moment's purchase. I owe you a few minutes; 'for this relief much thanks.' Leave me now, and make for your friends. They will look after you. I have none."

"Not a bit of it," replied Kenneth instantly. "We stick together. I know a quiet place where we can consult. Step out briskly, as if we have important business on hand."

"There's nothing hypothetical about that," murmured the other. "On, then!"

They hurried along the street, which was crowded with persons of all ages, some talking excitedly, others cheering and singing patriotic songs. Now and then there was a cry of "Down with England!" The two fugitives walked quickly, dodging among the crowd to avoid the wearers of military or police uniforms, their own uniforms clearing a way for them. As they passed a beershop, the outside tables of which were thronged, the drinkers cheered them and broke lustily into the song of Deutschland über Alles.

As soon as possible they turned into a side street, less populous; and Kenneth, who knew the city well, directed his course towards the river, to a little secluded nook, where he hoped it would be possible to hold a quiet consultation. In the hurry of escape and the anxious transit of the streets he had been unable to devote a moment's thought to their future action. It was clear that their safety hung by a thread; their only chance was to lay their plans calmly, taking due account of the present circumstances and future contingencies.

They reached their destination. There was nobody about.

"We may have a few minutes to ourselves," said Kenneth. He took out his watch. "It is nearly ten o'clock. My train has gone, so that's out of the question."

"You were leaving?"

"Yes; my friends thought I had better go; that was before war with England was certain. I suppose it is true?"

"The time limit has not expired, certainly; but there can't be any doubt about it. Germany can't afford to yield about Belgium, and we can't afford to let her have a walk over. We may be quite sure that no Englishman of fighting age will get away now without trouble. But your friends will protect you; again I say, don't consider me."

"That's all right. In any case I don't want to get Max Finkelstein into a row."

"Of Amory & Finkelstein?"

"Yes; I'm Kenneth Amory. Do you speak German, by the way?"

"Like a native. I was at school at Heidelberg."

"That's a help. But for the life of me I can't think of a way of getting out. When they discover our escape they'll watch the stations, the piers, and the roads. Our uniforms won't be a bit of use."

"Oh! for the wings of a dove!--or an eagle would be more to the purpose."

"By Jove! that gives me an idea. I've done some flying; I was going to try for a place in our Flying Corps. If we could only bag an aeroplane!"

"A sheer impossibility, I should say."

Kenneth stood silent in the attitude of one deep in thought. Every now and again his right eyelid twitched--a little involuntary mannerism which came into play at such times. His companion watched him curiously. At last a look of resolution chased the doubt from his face.

"It's the only way," he said; "we must have a try. There are plenty in Cologne. They've been using a new aviation ground lately; the regular aerodrome was too small for them. They don't fly at night. All the machines will be in their hangars. Of course they'll be under guard; but we might get hold of one by a trick. Give me another minute or two to think it out: I know the place well."

After a few minutes' silence there ensued an earnest conversation between the two. The upshot of it was that they hurried by unfrequented roads to the new aviation ground. It was a large enclosure defended by a wooden fence about eight feet high, with barbed wire along the top. A sentry stood at the gate near the sheds. The whole place was in darkness, but a little beyond it, on the far side of the road, shone the lights of a beershop.

Leaving his companion in a dark corner, Kenneth hastened alone to the beershop. At the tables outside sat several men, mechanics in appearance. Kenneth slackened his pace to a policeman's walk, and passed by, throwing a keen glance at the men, who gave him a perfunctory salute. On reaching the remotest table he whispered a word or two to the man drinking alone there. The man left his bock, and rising, joined Kenneth, who had drawn back into the darkness.

"You can be discreet?" he said.

"What is it, Herr Policeman?" the man replied, doubtfully.

"It is a question of a spy. One of the mechanics is suspected. Do you know a short dark man who has recently come in?"

The question was a bait cast at a venture; Kenneth was elated at the man's reply.

"Yes, to be sure; there is a new fellow, mechanic to Herr Lieutenant Breul. None of us liked the look of him. If he is a spy! ... Not that he is particularly short."

"Well, not so very short."

"Nor more than common dark."

"Not a gipsy, perhaps; but still, rather dark and certainly not tall."

"That's the fellow to a hair. He's a boor: why, he called me a stupid pig only this morning. That's suspicious in itself; for I'm not a stupid pig; I can prove it by my school certificates."

"Of course; you wouldn't be employed here if you were a stupid pig. Well now, Herr Lieutenant Breul ought to be warned."

"That's true. The Herr Lieutenant is not here now; he has gone for the night with the other officers. But it would be better to arrest the man at once. A spy! We'll do for him, me and my mates."

"Not so fast. We must make sure of the man. I ought to hold him under observation. But it is important to keep the matter quiet. The question is, can you manage to let me have a sight of the man without attracting attention?"

The man scratched his head.

"You don't want to enter by the gate, Herr Policeman?"

"No. It would never do to let it get about that a spy was found here."

"Well, it's not an easy matter, but I'll go to the sheds and see what can be done."

The man went away, Kenneth hastened to the spot where he had left his companion.

"Things look possible," he said. "But your uniform is a difficulty. A German officer mustn't enter the enclosure like a thief, and without the password you can't go in by the gate."

"I must simply bluff it out. I'm a friend of Lieutenant Breul. I've played many parts in my time--not without success."

"Come along then. There's no time to lose."

They hurried back to the dark corner in which Kenneth had interviewed the mechanic. In a few minutes he returned.

"This is a friend of the Herr Lieutenant's," said Kenneth. "I met him just beyond the gate, and he agrees with me that this disgraceful matter must be kept secret. Have you had any success?"

"The fellow is overhauling the Herr Lieutenant's engine in preparation for a start to-morrow. He is the only man at work."

"That's very suspicious," said Kenneth. "Don't you think, Herr Captain, that we had better climb the fence and keep a watch on the man? Who knows what mischief he may be doing?"

"I'll go back to the gate and meet you inside," replied his companion.

"I think you had better come with me, Herr Captain," said Kenneth, "Your presence would guarantee me if any soldier within chanced to suppose that I was intruding."

"Very well," returned the other, with seeming reluctance. "But you also must guarantee me against damage to my clothes."

"That is easily done. This man will throw his coat over the wire."

"Certainly, Herr Policeman," said the mechanic, whom the presence of an officer had quite reassured.

They moved off to a spot beyond the sheds. The mechanic laid his coat upon the wire, and assisted the fugitives to mount. Then he hurried back to the gate, entered the enclosure, and met them near the furthest shed. The whirring of a propeller was audible.

"That's the shed," he said, pointing to the half-open door through which a bright light was streaming. "He's at work there, running the engine."

"Very well," said Kenneth. "You had better get your coat and make yourself scarce. You won't want to appear in this."

"Not I," said the man.

"The Herr Lieutenant will reward you," said Kenneth's companion. He knew German officers too well to tip the man in the English way.

The mechanic slipped away into the darkness. The Englishmen went to the shed. They opened the door and entered boldly. A man was bending over the engine, spanner in hand, adjusting a nut on the carburetter. He had not noticed the opening of the door or the entrance of the strangers. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder, and looking up, was amazed to hear an officer say, through the noise of the propeller:

"Villain, you are under arrest."

Dumbfounded, he stared stupidly at the officer, and feebly protesting, stood back from the machine. Meanwhile Kenneth had taken a tin of petrol from a cupboard in the corner of the shed, and was filling up the tank. When this was done, he ran his eye rapidly over the monoplane, tested the stays, and finding all in good order, said in English:

"We'll lock this fellow in the cupboard. Then you throw the door open, come back quickly, and get into the seat beside me. The engine is running well, and it will only take a few seconds to get off."

At the first words of English the mechanic shouted with alarm; but his cry was drowned by the whirring of the propeller, and before he could repeat it he was locked into the cupboard. Then the Englishman carried out Kenneth's instructions. As soon as he was in his place, Kenneth threw the engine into gear, and the machine glided forward out of the shed into the dimly lit open space beyond. In a few yards it began to rise. There were shouts of surprise from the few men about the grounds and the mechanics in the beershop outside, scarcely heard by the airmen.

The monoplane soared up and up, unnoticed by the noisy multitudes in the crowded streets below. It was soon out of sight. Suddenly a beam of blinding light flashed upon it from some point high above the ground.

"The searchlight on the cathedral steeple," shouted Kenneth to his companion. "But there's no danger; they'll recognise it as a Taube."

The searchlight followed its course for a few minutes; then was shut off.

"The second trick is to us!" cried the passenger.

But Kenneth did not hear him. His whole attention was given to the machine.

CHAPTER IV--IN NEUTRAL TERRITORY

The sky was clear; there was very little wind; and Kenneth realised that the conditions could hardly have been more propitious. For some minutes he was too closely occupied with the mechanism to consider direction. The monoplane was strange to him. His experience of flying had been almost wholly gained in the machines of his friend Remi Pariset, son of the manager of the Antwerp branch of Amory & Finkelstein. Pariset was a lieutenant in the Belgian flying corps, and Kenneth had frequently accompanied him in flights, at first as passenger only, afterwards being allowed to try his hand in the pilot's seat. It had long been his aim to gain the pilot's certificate in England, and, as he had told Frieda Finkelstein, he hoped on the outbreak of war to get a commission in the Royal Flying Corps.

Though he had never before managed a monoplane of the type of that which he had appropriated, he had often watched the German airmen, and after a little uncertainty in his manipulation of the controls, he "felt" the machine, and recognised that it would give him no trouble. Then he had leisure to determine his course.

His first idea had been to make all speed to the Belgian coast, and take ship for England. But recollection of the conversation overheard between Hellwig and his visitor suggested that he might possibly do some preliminary service to the Belgians. A bridge was to be blown up. There could be no doubt that this operation was part of the German plan of campaign, and if it could be frustrated, this would represent so much gain to the defending force. The river spanned by the bridge had not been named, but there was a clue in the fact that the bridge was near a mill. His intention now, therefore, was to alight somewhere in Belgium and communicate his discovery to the military authorities.

In the hurry of departure he was quite oblivious of the direction of his flight. Now that he had time to consider it, he saw by the compass that he was flying towards the north-east. Bringing the monoplane round, he set his course for the south-west, hoping to pick up in half an hour or so the lights of Aix-la-Chapelle. He failed to locate the railway line from Cologne to Aix, and the few scattered points of light in the black expanse below gave him no landmarks.

After a while it occurred to him to switch on the electric light that illuminated the dial of a small clock. It was a quarter to eleven. He must have been flying for nearly half an hour, but neither to right or left nor straight ahead was there any sign of the expected lights of Aix. The country over which he was passing seemed to be hilly; it was possible that the lights of the city were hidden by the shoulder of a hill.

Presently his companion shouted that he heard the sound of big guns away to the left. Kenneth listened, but could hear nothing through the droning whirr of the propeller.

Every now and then he glanced at the clock, the only indication of the distance he had covered. When midnight was past, he felt sure that unless he had completely miscalculated his direction he must by this time have crossed the German frontier. He was thinking of landing and trying to discover where he was, when he caught sight in the starlight of a broad river flowing immediately beneath him from south-west to north-east. This, he had no doubt, was the Meuse, but he knew nothing of the course of the river, and could not determine whether he was in Belgium or Holland. At any rate he was out of Germany.

Dropping a few hundred feet, and seeing below him a broad expanse of fields, apparently flat, he thought it safe to risk a descent. No lights were visible. A rapid swoop brought the machine into a meadow of long grass ripe for hay, and

he came lightly to the ground.

"I make you my compliments," said his companion, as they climbed out of their seats. "It is my first aerial voyage, and I am pretty sure that no one has ever tempted the empyrean under such exciting circumstances. But why did you come down? I hoped we should find ourselves at Ostend."

"I'll tell you my reason. I don't know where I am, but we had better camp here till morning, and then explore. Keep a look-out while I glance over the engine; we must be ready to get off again at a moment's notice."

He switched on the light and made a careful examination of the engine; then, rubbing his dirty hands on the grass, he threw himself down beside his companion.

"We've had uncommon luck," he said.

"You under-estimate the personal equation," returned the other. "I consider myself supremely lucky in having met you. Your daring is as great as your ingenuity, Amory. By the way, I have the advantage of you. I have as many names as the chameleon has colours, but the names given me in baptism were Lewis Granger. Now we're quits on that score."

"Thanks. You are a spy, I suppose?"

"Well, that rather opprobrious term would cover me, I presume. A sensitive person might prefer to call himself a secret agent. What's in a name?"

"It's pretty dangerous work, anyhow, and I'm jolly glad you're out of the Germans' clutches. You asked why I came down. It's because I'm a sort of secret agent too."

"You don't say so!"

"Oh, it's quite involuntary. I happened to overhear a conversation a few hours before I was nabbed. I'll tell you about it."

"Wait. I have no credentials. Do you think it wise to confide in a stranger?"

"That's all right," said Kenneth, who had taken an instant liking to the man. "We're in the same boat. What I overheard was a scheme for blowing up a bridge somewhere in Belgium, and I thought that before going on to England I might put the Belgians up to it."

"That's worth a few hours' delay. What you say confirms my own knowledge of the extraordinary minuteness of the German plans. 'Somewhere in Belgium,' you say. You don't know where?"

"No. The name of the river was not mentioned either by Hellwig or----"

"Hellwig! Does his Christian name happen to be Kurt?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"I have crossed swords with him--not literally, you understand, though nothing would please me better than a bout with him with the buttons off. I have one or two scores to settle with him. His Christian name would be more

truly descriptive with the loss of a T. But how in the world did you come across him? He's not the kind of man I should expect to meet in your company."

"He's the cousin of my poor father's partner, Max Finkelstein. Max gives him a salary; he doesn't earn a penny of it, but Max is a kind-hearted beggar. He wouldn't do it if he knew that Hellwig was a--secret agent."

"Don't mind my feelings, my dear fellow," said Granger, with a laugh. "We're a very mixed lot, I assure you. Do you mind repeating what you overheard, as nearly as you can remember it?"

When the story was told, Granger acknowledged that ignorance of the position of the bridge was an obstacle to forewarning the Belgian authorities.

"Still, they ought to know every inch of the probable theatre of war," he said, "and may spot the place at once."

"We'll see in the morning," said Kenneth. "Meanwhile we had better take watch and watch about during the rest of the night. I don't suppose any one will come by while it's dark, but it's as well to be on the safe side. I'll take first watch."

"Very well. It will be light in less than five hours. I'll snooze for a couple of hours; wake me then."

The night was warm, and Kenneth, in his policeman's coat, suffered no discomfort. His watch passed undisturbed, and he was very sleepy when he roused Granger.

About five o'clock he was wakened from a sound sleep by a nudge from his companion.

"Sorry to disturb you," said Granger, "but there's a group of peasants approaching with scythes. Evidently they are going to mow the meadow."

Kenneth started up.

"Belgians?" he asked.

"Or Dutch," replied Granger. "We shall soon know."

The peasants, more than a dozen in number, came straight towards the aeroplane. Recognising the German uniforms, as the two men rose from the ground, they halted, consulted for a moment or two, then advanced, holding their scythes threateningly.

"I fancy they're Dutch," said Granger. "My good friends," he called in Dutch, "will you tell us where we are?"

On hearing their own tongue the men consulted again. Then one of them left the party, and hurried back by the way he had come. The rest advanced slowly, keeping close together, not replying to the question, and wearing an air of suspicion and hostility.

"They have sent a man back to his village to warn the authorities," said Granger. "We must find out where we are."

The peasants halted at a little distance, and stood in an attitude of watch-

fulness.

"We are not Germans, in spite of our dress," Granger continued. "As a matter of fact, we are Englishmen who have lost our way."

The stolid Dutchmen looked round upon one another with a knowing air as much as to say "We have heard that story before." Granger tried again.

"Come, come, it is the truth, I assure you. All we want is to know where we are; then we will pursue our journey."

There was again a consultation among the group. Then one of them said, pugnaciously:

"You are near Weert, as you know very well."

"Weert is some few miles north-east of Maestricht," Granger remarked to Kenneth. "We don't want to know any more. I think we had better be off. They don't believe we are not Germans, and as neutrals they will hold us up if we wait until the village authorities arrive. I hope they won't show fight, for we are absolutely unarmed, and those scythes are rather formidable implements."

"We're in an awkward hole, certainly," said Kenneth. "By the look of them they'll set on to us as soon as they see us making ready to go."

"The police took my revolver when they searched me," said Granger; "otherwise we might intimidate them."

"I wonder--" began Kenneth, thrusting his hand into the inner pocket of his coat. "By Jove! What luck! Here's the policeman's revolver. Keep them back with that while I start the engine. I shall only be a minute or two."

Granger took the revolver unobtrusively. Kenneth went to the front of the aeroplane and swung the propeller round, the peasants watching him at first without understanding. When the engine began to fire, however, they realised the meaning of the movements, and came on brandishing their scythes. Granger, standing close by the seat, lifted the revolver.

"Now, my good men," he said amiably, "we are going to leave you, as you appear not to relish our company. If any of you come within a dozen yards of us I shall fire."

The men came to a halt, scowling at the little weapon pointed at them by a steady arm. Kenneth got into his seat.

"I'm ready," he said.

Granger slowly backed and handed him the revolver, with which Kenneth covered the peasants as his companion clambered up beside him. Even before Granger was seated the aeroplane began to move. The peasants scattered out of its path, cursing the German pigs. It rose into the air; Kenneth swung it round to the south-west, and in half a minute it was sailing away out of danger. Glancing round, Granger smiled as he caught sight of a half squadron of Dutch cavalry galloping into the meadow behind them.

[image]

"THE PEASANTS SCATTERED OUT OF ITS PATH"

CHAPTER V--A CLOSE CALL

Remembering that they had crossed the Meuse the night before, Kenneth steered to the left until he sighted the river, then deflected southward, and followed its course, keeping on the side of the left bank.

There was no means of telling at what point he would cross the northern frontier of Belgium. Ascending to a great height, in order to escape shots from either Belgian or Dutch frontier guards, he soon discovered a town of some size extended on both banks of the river. This could only be Maestricht. Within twenty minutes of passing this he came in sight of a much more considerable town through which the river flowed spanned by several bridges.

"Better land now," shouted Granger, "or they'll be taking shots at us from the forts. This is Liége."

Almost before he had finished speaking the monoplane began to rock like a ship at sea, and Kenneth had to exert his utmost skill to preserve its equilibrium. A shell had burst a few hundred yards below them. Some seconds later they heard the dull thunder of the gun's discharge. Clearly it was no longer safe to continue the southward course. Kenneth swerved to the right, and making a steep vol plane, swooped into the cornfield of a farmhouse close by the high road.

The people of the farm, at the sight of the German uniforms, fled precipitately for shelter. Already "the terror of the German name" had become a by-word in the countryside.

"We are in hot water, I'm afraid," said Granger. "Strip off your coat; you're all right underneath."

Kenneth had hardly taken off his coat and helmet when there was a sound of galloping horses. A dozen Belgian mounted infantrymen dashed up the road,

leapt the low wall of the farm steading, and shouted to them to surrender. Granger whipped out his pocket handkerchief and waved it in the air. The Belgians dismounted, and part of them advanced, the lieutenant at their head with revolver pointed, the men covering the fugitives with their rifles.

"You are our prisoners," said the officer in bad German.

"Charmed, my dear sir," replied Granger in excellent French. "Contrary to appearances, we are not Germans, but Englishmen."

"Ah bah!" snorted the lieutenant. "You wear German uniforms."

"L'habit ne fait pas le moine," said Granger with a smile. "The fact is as I state it: we are Englishmen who have escaped from Cologne."

"The aeroplane is German," the officer persisted.

"We commandeered it, there being no English machine available. Unluckily we have no papers on us to prove our nationality; they were taken from us by the Germans who arrested us as spies."

"Bah!" said the lieutenant again. That two Englishmen arrested as spies should have been able to escape on a German monoplane laid too great a strain upon his imagination. "You are my prisoners. Hand over your arms."

Granger at once gave up the revolver, and Kenneth allowed himself to be searched. The officer rummaged the aeroplane for plans and other incriminating documents, then ordered two of his men to mount guard over it, and marched the prisoners through the farmyard to the road, under the gratified glances of the farm people at their windows. Kenneth carried his policeman's uniform.

After walking about a mile, they came to a regiment encamped in a field beside the road. The lieutenant led his prisoners to the commanding officer, and explained the circumstances of their capture.

"You say you are English?" he said, scanning the two men.

"I assure you that is the truth," replied Granger. "We were both arrested as spies in Cologne, but by an ingenious stratagem of my friend here we obtained possession of a German aeroplane, and are delighted to find ourselves in Belgian territory, among a friendly people."

"You speak very good French."

"Which is not to our discredit, I hope," said Granger with a smile.

The Colonel was plainly even more incredulous than his subordinate. A man who spoke such good French must be a German spy! He took up the receiver of a field telephone. Ascertaining that an aide de camp was at the other end of the wire he said:

"Two men, one in police, the other in military uniform, German, have landed from a Taube monoplane west of Liers. They say they are English, but they are clearly German spies. I await orders."

The prisoners, who had heard all, watched his face grimly set as he held the

receiver to his ear.

"It's extraordinary, the persistence of a fixed idea," said Granger in a low tone to Kenneth. "If he heard us speaking English I suppose he would take it as a clinching proof that we are Germans! The uniforms, our salvation in Cologne, are here our damnation."

"They'll send us to the General, won't they? He won't be such an ass."

"We shall see."

A few minutes passed. Then the look of blank expectancy on the Colonel's face gave way to a look of satisfaction. He laid down the receiver.

"Shoot them!" he said laconically, turning to the lieutenant.

Granger smiled at Kenneth, whose cheeks had gone red with indignation rather than pale from fear.

"What rot!" said the boy.

"I said I should die in my boots," remarked Granger. "My fate has been hanging over me these ten years. But there's a chance for you. Why not tell them about the bridge?"

"They'd only think I was funking, and wouldn't believe me. I won't do it."

They were led away towards a clump of trees on the outskirts of the camp. The lieutenant was selecting his firing party. A crowd of troopers, some in uniform, others in their shirt sleeves, came flocking around. One or two officers moved more leisurely towards the scene. Suddenly one of these started, and hurried forward with an exclamation of surprise.

"Mon Dieu, it's you, Ken!" he cried, seizing Kenneth's hand.

"Hullo, Remi," said Kenneth, his face lighting up. "Just tell your colonel I'm not a German, will you?"

"Of course I will. And your friend?"

"As English as I am. This is my pal, Remi Pariset," he said to Granger.

"I am delighted to meet you," said Granger, bowing, "even though our acquaintance should prove of the shortest."

Pariset, asking his fellow lieutenant to delay, ran to the Colonel, and returned immediately with him.

"I beg a thousand pardons, gentlemen," said the Colonel. "I am desolated at the injustice I have unwittingly done you. Pray accept my apologies."

"Not at all, Colonel," said Granger. "Appearances were against us. You were quite justified in your suspicions; it was our misfortune that we couldn't change our dress on the way.... I've had many a close shave," he added in an undertone to Kenneth, "but was never quite so near my quietus."

"I was feeling rather rummy," Kenneth confessed: "a queer feeling, not exactly fear; a sort of emptiness."

When the troopers learnt the truth, they broke into cries of "Vivent les

Anglais! Vive l'Angleterre!" and the prisoners found themselves the idols of the camp. They were invited to join the officers at lunch, and ate with good appetites, having had no food but rye bread and beer since the previous midday. The officers drank their health with hilarity when Granger had related the trick by means of which they had escaped from Cologne, and Kenneth was toasted with embarrassing fervour.

"The bridge! That will be a clincher," whispered Granger in his ear.

Kenneth's French was not so good as his German, but he managed, even though haltingly, to convey to his interested auditors the gist of the scheme he had overheard. The officers were much concerned. None of them was able to identify the place from the bare description which was all that Kenneth could give them. The bridge was clearly not in the line of the Germans' probable advance; its destruction could only be meant to assist them. But the clues, slight though they were, must be followed up, and the Colonel declared that he would communicate with headquarters about the matter.

After lunch he took Kenneth aside.

"I gather that you have not known your companion long?" he said.

"That is true," replied Kenneth. "I met him for the first time yesterday."

"You will pardon me, I am sure. Lieutenant Pariset's voucher for you is sufficient; but in such times as these I should not be doing my duty if I allowed Mr. Granger to be at large without enquiry. Will you explain that to him, and ask him to give me a reference to a British authority?"

"Certainly. I am sure you will find things all right."

"The dear man!" laughed Granger when Kenneth told him this. "He needn't have been so careful of my feelings as to ask you to break it to me. I've no doubt I can satisfy him."

He mentioned the name of an official high in the British Foreign Office.

"A telegram to that address will bring me a character," he said. "Meanwhile I am out of work, and a sort of prisoner on parole. I am sorry, because I fear it means that we shall be separated for a time. You, I suppose, will want to be up and doing."

"Yes. I've talked things over with Pariset, and he wants me to go with him in his aeroplane in search of that bridge. But we'll meet again before long. I'm jolly glad we came across each other."

They shook hands cordially and parted.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Pariset had been in consultation with the commander of the Belgian Flying Corps. It had been decided that Pariset, accompanied by Kenneth, should make a reconnaissance in his aeroplane along the railway lines with a view to discover the bridge that was threatened. The German monoplane, though faster than his own, was discarded: it would certainly have been fired

upon as it crossed the Belgian lines. There was no clue as to the direction in which the bridge lay, whether north, east, south or west of Liége. But it seemed certain that the Germans would not wish to blow up any bridges on the east. They would rather preserve them, in order to facilitate their advance. It was more probable that the bridge in question was on a section of the railway by which reinforcements, either French or Belgian, might be despatched to Liége. It was therefore decided to scout to the west and south.

Early in the afternoon Pariset and Kenneth started, working towards Brussels by way of Tirlemont and Louvain. Kenneth had been provided with field-glasses, through which he closely scanned every bridge and culvert, while Pariset piloted the machine. Flying low, they were able to examine the line thoroughly. All that Kenneth had to guide him was the knowledge that the bridge was near a mill. There was a tunnel between them. It was therefore pretty clear that the bridge and the mill could not be far apart.

They flew over the main line as far as Brussels without discovering any bridge that fulfilled the conditions. Then they retraced their course and scouted along the branch lines running south from Louvain, Tirlemont and Landen respectively. Within a few hours they had examined the whole triangular district that had Brussels, Liége, and Namur at its angles. At Namur they descended for a short rest, then set off again, to try their luck on the lines running from the French frontier.

Both felt somewhat discouraged. To trace the many hundreds of miles of railway that crossed the country between the Meuse and the Somme promised to be work for a week. Indeed, it was getting dark by the time they had run through the coal-mining and manufacturing district between Mons and Valenciennes. Alighting at the latter place, they heard that great numbers of German troops had already crossed the Belgian frontier, and the forts of Liége were being attacked. There was much excitement in the town, and Pariset had some difficulty in getting petrol to replenish his tanks.

Next morning they set off early along the line running eastward through Maubeuge to Charleroi. It seemed unlikely that they would find the spot they sought in the midst of a manufacturing district, but if they were to succeed, nothing must be left untried.

Towards ten o'clock they were crossing a stream to the south-east of Charleroi when Kenneth suddenly gave a shout. He had noticed on the stream a water-mill, between which and a larger river, apparently the Sambre, the railway crossed the stream on a brick bridge of four arches. The mill was at least two hundred yards from the bridge, a distance that seemed too great to have been tunnelled; but it was the first spot he had seen that in any way conformed to the particulars he had overheard, and it appeared worth while to examine the place

more closely.

The importance of the bridge was obvious. Its destruction would seriously delay the transport of any French troops that might be sent northwards to support Namur or Liége, and correspondingly assist the Germans in an attempt to take either of those towns by a coup de main.

At Kenneth's shout Pariset turned his head, understood that some discovery had been made, and nodded. He did not at once prepare to alight. If Germans were in possession of the mill they would notice the sudden cessation of the noise of the propeller, which they must have heard, and might take warning from the descent of the aeroplane in their neighbourhood. Luckily he had been flying low, so that the course of the machine could not be followed for any considerable distance. Having run out of sight beyond a wood, he selected an open field for his descent, and alighted a few hundred yards from a farmhouse.

"Have you found it?" asked Pariset eagerly.

"I saw a mill and a railway bridge," replied Kenneth; "but we were going too fast for me to be sure it's the right place."

"Well, we shall have to find that out. We'll get the farmer to help us run the machine into his yard, and then reconnoitre."

The farmer and a group of his men were already hurrying towards them. In a few words Pariset enlisted their help. The aeroplane was run into the yard, and placed behind a row of ricks that concealed it from the outside.

"We should like some bread and cheese and beer," Pariset said to the farmer. "May we come in?"

"Surely, monsieur," was the reply. "Come in and welcome. Ah! these are terrible times. I don't know how long I shall have a roof over my head. But they say the English are coming to help us. Is that true?"

"Quite true. My friend here is an Englishman."

"Thank God! Oh! les braves Anglais! All will be well now. Come in, messieurs; you shall have the best I can give you."

CHAPTER VI--THE OLD MILL

Sitting in the farm-kitchen, and eating the farmer's homely fare, Pariset talked a little about the war, and led the way discreetly to the questions he was eager to ask.

"The mill, monsieur? 'Tis twenty years since it was used. I used to send my corn to it, but nowadays I send it to Charleroi, where a steam-mill grinds it more cheaply. The old miller is a good friend of mine, but he retired twenty years ago; he's a warm man, to be sure. That's his house yonder:" he pointed to a cottage half a mile away across the fields. "We often have a gossip over a mug of beer."

"It's just as well he made his money before steam-mills became so common," said Pariset. "I suppose it wasn't worth any one's while to keep the water-mill going?"

"No; there's no money in milling of the old sort now. But it goes to my heart to see the old mill idle. Such a loss, too. But the miller can stand it; he's a warm man, as I told you. And after all, he has made a little out of it lately. But it's a come-down, that's what I say."

"It is idle, you said."

"Yes, to be sure, and always will be. But the miller has let it for two years past. He makes a little out of it, and so do I, not so much as I should like, for the gentleman is only there now and then. He's a Swiss gentleman that keeps a hotel in Namur. A great fisherman, he is; he'll fish for hours in the millpond, and I wonder he has the patience for it, for there's not much to be caught there since the grinding stopped. Still, I don't complain; he buys my eggs and butter when he comes there, two or three times a year perhaps. He's there now, with a few friends of his."

"I should like to have a chat with your friend the miller," said Pariset.

"He'd like it too, monsieur. He doesn't have much company, and he'd like to hear about things from an officer; you can't believe what you read in the papers. I'll take you across the fields."

In a few minutes they were seated in a cosy little parlour, opposite a sturdy countryman, hale and hearty in spite of his seventy odd years. He asked shrewd

questions about the war, foresaw great trouble for his country, but, like the farmer, was cheered by the news that "les braves Anglais" were coming once more to her rescue. When Pariset led up to the subject of his mill he became animated.

"Ah! the old mill is a rare old place," he said with a chuckle. "The things I could tell you! There was more than milling in the old days. Times are changed. We're all for law now. But in my grandfather's time--why, monsieur, he's dead and gone this forty years, so it will do him no harm if I tell you he was a smuggler. Many and many a barrel of good brandy used to get across the border without paying duty. Why, underneath the old mill there are cellars and passages where he used to store contraband worth thousands of francs. I used to steal down there when I was a boy, and ma foi! it made my skin creep, though there was nothing to be afraid of. But 'tis fifty years since my old grandfather closed them down, and they've never been opened up since."

"Your present tenant is a hotel-keeper, I hear. He would be interested to know about the smuggling."

"That he was, to be sure. He laughed when I told him about it. 'We can't get rich that way nowadays,' said he. He seems to have plenty of money, though; pays me a good rent. 'Tis strange what whims gentlemen have. A month's fishing in the pond wouldn't feed him for a week. He calls it sport; well, in my young days I liked something more lively. But the fishing is just an excuse; he comes there now and then for a change and quiet, though he's not a solitary, like some fishermen. He has a party of friends sometimes; all Swiss like himself."

"French Swiss?" asked Pariset.

"No, German Swiss. For my part, I've no great liking for German Swiss. They're only one remove from Germans. But his money is good, and it's something to make a little money out of the old mill after all these years."

The old man spoke quite frankly, and evidently had no suspicions about his tenant. Pariset thought it safe to disillusion him.

"Would you be surprised to learn that your fisherman is actually a German?" he said.

"But that is impossible," said the miller. "He would have gone back to Germany, because of the war."

"Unless he is a spy! We have reason to believe that he is, and that he is using your mill for the benefit of the enemy. That is what has brought us here."

"Sacre nom de nom!" the old man ejaculated, and the farmer thumped the table and swore. "Is that the truth, monsieur?"

"We suspect him of intending to blow up the railway bridge at a given signal."

"Ah! the villain! And he will use the underground passages. That is why he pays me a high rent, parbleu! But he has come to the end of his tether. You are

here to arrest him?"

"No. We have no men with us. We came to learn whether our suspicions were justified. We are not sure of our man yet."

"Bah!" shouted the old man, red with fury. "It is certain. He has fooled me. I will raise the countryside. We will fall on these Germans. Before night they shall lie in the dungeons of Charleroi."

"Do you think that is the way to go to work?" Pariset asked tactfully. "They would hardly allow themselves to be caught napping; at the first alarm they would no doubt blow up the bridge, and I take it that to prevent that is even more important than to seize the men themselves--though our aim should be to do both."

"It is true, monsieur. I am an old man. This is the day of young men. Oh that I were forty years younger and able to serve my country! But you will not let them go? You will bring some of our brave soldiers here and capture the villains?"

"There may not be time for that. We must meet craft with craft. If we could only reconnoitre the mill we might be able to hit upon a plan. My uniform would give me away, if I approached the place as I am; you could no doubt lend me some clothes to disguise myself?"

"Surely, monsieur; but----"

He broke off, eyeing Pariset's face, with its small military moustache, doubtfully.

At this moment they heard the rumble of a heavy vehicle on the road.

"It is the beer, compère," said the farmer, glancing out of the window.

"Ah! the beer!" repeated the miller. "I might have known they were Germans! Every week they have a barrel delivered from Charleroi, and it is not the local brew, but the Lion brew from Munich."

He had moved to the window, followed by his visitors. A heavy dray laden with beer was lumbering down the road. As it came opposite to the house the drayman hailed the miller, pulling up his horses.

"The Germans are shelling Liége," he said. "Maybe 'tis the last time I shall come this way. Your good tenants had better clear out."

"Good tenants!" cried the old man explosively.

"Quiet!" said Pariset, touching him on the sleeve. "Don't tell him they are Germans."

"Ah! You are right, monsieur. But my blood boils. You are going to the mill?" he asked the drayman.

"Yes. 'Tis only a small barrel to-day--not the big one they usually have. There aren't so many of them, seemingly. I was just loading up the usual nine gallons when the order came from the office to take a four-and-a-half instead."

Pariset glanced quickly at Kenneth.

"They're going to clear out soon," he said in a low tone. "It looks as though

we're only just in time."

They drew aside from the others while the miller gossiped with the drayman.

"I say, you talked of disguising yourself," said Kenneth. "Why shouldn't you take the drayman's place and deliver the beer? You could then take stock of the place and the people."

"A capital notion! I must take the drayman into my confidence. Wait a minute," he called out of the window, as the man was about to drive on. In a few words he explained the plan to the miller.

"Parbleu, monsieur, but look at his size!" said the old man.

"Yes, that's a difficulty, I admit," said Pariset ruefully. "He would make three of me. The Germans aren't fools, and if they saw me with his smock flapping about me they would smell a rat."

"And your face and hands, monsieur--no, decidedly you could not pass for a drayman."

Pariset bit his nails in perplexity. Kenneth stared musingly at the dray.

"I've an idea!" he said. "Pretend that the drayman has been called up. The brewer is short-handed, and has to send clerks out of the office to deliver the beer: two clerks equal one drayman. Besides, if I go with you, I may catch sight of that fellow I saw with Hellwig, and make sure he's our man."

"The very thing! Your clothes are all right; I must borrow a suit from the miller. But wait: won't Hellwig's man recognise you?"

"I'll guard against that--smear my face with rust off the cask-hoops, and borrow a slouch hat which I'll keep well down over my eyes. It's worth trying."

Delighted with the plan, the miller furnished them with the necessary garments. In a few minutes Pariset, got up passably as a clerk, went out to the drayman, who was becoming impatient. The man swore when he learnt that his customers were suspected to be spies, and readily agreed to remain in the miller's house and await the issue of the stratagem. Meanwhile Kenneth had rubbed his cheeks and hands with rust, and in the low flopping hat lent him by the miller would hardly have been recognised by his friends, much less, he hoped, by a man who had seen him for only a few minutes.

"I had better drive," said Kenneth; "then I can keep in the background while you are delivering the cask, if you can tackle it alone."

"That will be easy enough. I see there's a ladder or inclined plane or whatever they call it on the dray. I've only to roll the cask down and trundle it to the door. I don't suppose they'll let me carry it inside."

Kenneth took the reins, and drove off, Pariset, who also had smeared face and hands, dangling his legs over the tail of the dray. They jogged down the road, passed under the railway bridge, and came in due course to the mill.

The premises were surrounded by an old and dilapidated wall, but they noticed that along its top ran a row of formidable spikes, apparently of recent date. The front door of the mill-house faced the road. It was stoutly built of oak studded with nails, and was flanked on both sides by barred windows. The smuggling miller who built the place had evidently made himself secure against surprise.

When the dray drew up before the door, Pariset sprang down and jerked the iron bell-pull. From the driver's seat Kenneth saw a face appear for an instant at one of the windows. After a short interval the bolts were withdrawn, the door opened, and a man stood on the threshold. Kenneth tingled; he had recognised him instantly as the man who had been in conversation with Hellwig. He turned his head so as not to show his full face, pulled his hat lower over his eyes, and hoped that the recognition had not been mutual. And he listened anxiously, wondering how Pariset would acquit himself in his novel part, and wishing for the moment that Granger was in his place.

Pariset, however, was cool and collected. He took the bull by the horns.

"I am sorry I am late, monsieur," he said, "but the fact is that all our carters are called up for transport purposes. Being anxious not to disappoint a valued customer, my master has sent us out of the office. We shan't be able to come again, for we're called up ourselves--all through those pigs of Germans, who are said to be across the frontier. We shan't be able to deliver any more beer, I'm afraid. It's a wonder we've any horses left."

The German merely grunted in answer to this.

"We're in for a very bad time," Pariset went on, as he hoisted the end of the cask on to the doorstep. "Hadn't you better go back to Switzerland, monsieur? Pardon the suggestion, but we don't know what may happen. If these German pigs come south----"

"Just roll it into the lobby," interrupted the German. "Here's the money. By the way, have you seen an aeroplane in the neighbourhood?"

"Yes, we saw one an hour or so ago. It was flying north-east. I shouldn't be surprised if it was German. The pigs are capable of anything. But they'll get a reception that will surprise them. Our little army--but there! You know what your own army would do, and your turn may come in Switzerland sooner than you think. Thank you: I am sorry we shan't be able to serve you again, by the look of things."

He laid the cask in the lobby, pocketed the money, and returned to the dray.

Meanwhile Kenneth had seized the opportunity to take a careful look around. It was clear that it would not be easy to take the place by a rush without giving the inmates sufficient time to fire the mine beneath the bridge. The fact that the German had come to the door himself, instead of the deaf old countryman whom he was said to employ as a man-of-all-work, showed that he was on

the alert. Nothing would be easier than to overpower the man himself; but if any noise were made in so doing his companions would instantly come to his assistance, and at the first sign that the plot had been discovered the bridge would be blown up. It seemed that the ruse would prove fruitless after all.

In turning the horses for the journey back, Kenneth contrived to bring the dray close against the wall, so that from his high seat he was able to look over. Through the open window of a room giving on the yard he saw a party of four men playing cards at a table. Close to the right hand of each stood a tall beer glass.

"That explains why they are such good customers of the brewery," he thought.

Pariset, sitting at the back of the dray with his face to the door, began to hum a tune, and Kenneth caught the words "En avant!" He whipped up the horses, big Flemish beasts that were evidently unaccustomed to go above a walking pace, and the heavy vehicle lumbered away.

"Why did you want me to hurry?" asked Kenneth, when they were some distance along the road.

"Because that fellow was standing at the door watching us," Pariset replied. "I wonder if he is suspicious?"

"I shouldn't think so. You played your part quite naturally. But we are right, Remi: that's the fellow I saw with Hellwig."

"Ah!" was all that Pariset said then.

CHAPTER VII--A HORNET'S NEST

"I am not at all happy about this," said Pariset, after a brief silence.

"We haven't learnt very much, certainly," said Kenneth.

"I don't mean that. We have learnt enough if that is your man. But I see no means of preventing the destruction of the bridge."

"We might fly to Charleroi and send a squadron of lancers back. There are only five men to deal with, apparently."

"That's not the difficulty. The point is that at the first sign of molestation they would fire the mine. You may depend upon it that they are picked men, with resolution enough to do their job, even at the cost of their lives. It would not be much use to capture them after the mischief was already done."

"The mine is to be fired on receipt of a marconigram."

"You didn't tell me that. It may happen at any minute, then. They must have wireless rigged up in the mill-house. We might have cut a wire, but with wireless we are helpless."

"Unless we could get into the mill," Kenneth suggested.

"Ah, if we could! But there's no chance of it. The fellow is on the qui vive: I don't like the way he looked after us."

"Wouldn't the old miller, as the landlord, have a right to go in?"

"I daresay, but the old man couldn't do anything. Even if he knew anything about wireless or mines, he would only get flustered; he certainly would quite fail to do any damage."

"Perhaps he could tell us of another way into the mill, so that we could do it ourselves."

"That could only be in the darkness, and they may fire the mine before night. I see nothing for it, after all, but to bring some cavalry from Charleroi and take care the men don't escape. We can do that, if we can't save the bridge."

"Why not wait a little? If the order to fire the mine comes suddenly, any time before night, we can't prevent it. But if it doesn't come before night, we still have a chance. In any case we ought to get some lancers over, to be in the neighbourhood at nightfall. It won't take long for one of us to get into Charleroi and back."

"That would be risky after that fellow's question about the aeroplane. The best course will be to send in a message by the drayman. I'll write a note as soon as we get back."

The drayman readily agreed to carry Pariset's note to the commandant of the Charleroi garrison. When he had departed, the miller was taken into consultation.

"Is there any other entrance to the millhouse besides the front door?" asked Pariset.

"There is a door to the stables, but that has long been nailed up," the old man replied.

"Describe the interior as well as you can."

"Well, monsieur, I lived there fifty years, so I ought to know something about it. You go in by the door; well, first there's the lobby; beyond that, straight ahead, is the kitchen, and beyond that again, looking on the stream, is the storeroom with the mill above. To the left of that is the hoist; and this side of it, overlooking the yard, is the big room, dining-room and parlour in one. There you have the

ground-floor; the bedrooms are upstairs."

"And the wall goes all round?"

"Yes, right down to the stream on each side, and along the bank, except where the wheel juts out into the waterway. The old wheel is dropping to pieces; it hasn't been used these twenty years."

"Couldn't we get in that way?"

"Ma foi! That's an idea, now. Many's the time I got in that way as a boy, when the wheel was stopped--just a boy's devilry, you understand. You could get in that way yet, if the woodwork isn't too rotten to bear your weight. You would have to wade the stream, but that isn't deep or swift except in winter. Old as I be I'll show you the way myself."

"We could get in without being heard?"

"To be sure, if the woodwork doesn't crack and give way. The kitchen is the nearest room; old Jules, the handy man, is as deaf as a post, and his wife, who does the cooking, isn't much better."

"And where is the entrance to the underground passages?"

"To the left of the kitchen, in the floor of the hoist."

As the miller answered his questions, Pariset sketched a rough plan of the building.

"Is that something like it?" he asked, handing the paper over.

The old man put on his spectacles deliberately, and examined the sketch.

"Near enough," he said. "Ma foi! But I couldn't have done that myself."

"Now the question is, when shall we try to get in?" asked Pariset. "The best time would be when the men are having a meal. The Germans take their meals seriously; if they are ever to be caught off their guard it is when they are feeding."

"That's true," said the miller. "They have their supper somewhere about seven o'clock. I know that because one evening I met old Jules coming back from the village all puffing and blowing. I asked him why he was in such a hurry for an old man; had to ask three times before he heard me; and he told me he'd forgotten the vinegar, and the gentlemen were very angry."

"Well, it's dusk at seven; the lancers will be here by half-past. We'll make our attempt then."

"Better go a little earlier, while it's light enough to see our way," suggested the miller. "I'm not so young as I was, and I doubt whether I could find my way in the dark."

"Very well. It's now nearly five; we have nearly two hours to wait. You'll give us a meal, miller?"

"To be sure; the best I have. I'd feed a regiment to capture a German spy."

Just before seven Pariset and Kenneth left the house with the miller. Pariset had given the farmer a note addressed to the officer of the expected lancers, asking

him to leave the horses at the farm, and post his men behind the hedge lining the road in the neighbourhood of the mill, ready to break in if they were called upon, or to intercept the Germans if they tried to escape.

The miller led the way across the fields, by a route which did not expose them to view from the mill-house until they arrived within a few yards of the bank of the stream opposite the wheel. The last part of the journey lay through a cornfield, the wheat growing so high that by stooping they completely hid themselves.

All was silent in the mill-house. Dusk was just falling. A lamp had already been lit in the kitchen, sending a ray of light across the yard to the left. The rear of the building, facing the stream, was dark.

Following the miller, the two young fellows stepped into the stream, and waded across knee deep till they stood below the wheel. It was an undershot wheel. The chains confining it were deeply rusted. Some of the floats had fallen away; others were broken; all were more or less decayed.

"I've done my part," the miller whispered. "You must squeeze through into the wheel and slide along the axle. Where it is let into the brickwork you'll find a hole big enough to crawl through. Climb up, and you'll find yourselves in a little room that used to be the tool-shop. Take care you don't stumble over the tools on the floor. At the further side there's a door into the storeroom. I can do no more. Que le bon Dieu vous protège!"

He shook hands with them in turn, recrossed the stream, and disappeared among the wheat stalks.

With some difficulty Pariset squeezed his body between two of the floats, hoisted himself up, and stood in the interior of the wheel. The rotten woodwork creaked, and the wheel itself groaned slightly as it moved an inch or two; but the movement was checked by the rusty chains. Kenneth followed more easily. They swung themselves on to the axle, jerked their way along it, came to the hole of which the miller had spoken, and clambering up through it, stood on the floor of the toolroom. Hands and clothes were coated with red rust.

The room was lit by a small window overlooking the stream. To their surprise, it was not empty except for a few rusty implements, as they had expected from the miller's description. A new deal bench stood against the wall, flanked by a turning lathe, and an elaborate engineering equipment.

"Electrical!" Pariset whispered.

Treading very carefully, they gently opened the door, took a look round, and passed into the capacious storeroom. Here they found the plant of a wireless telegraphy installation. The antennae passed through holes in the ceiling, emerging, as they guessed, under cover of the parapet, on the flat roof of the mill.

In the fast-fading light they were just able to see a doorway on the right,

leading, as they knew from the miller's description, to the hoist and shoot. In front of them was another door, now open, giving access to a passage between the kitchen and the dining-room. Pariset slipped off his wet boots.

"Wait here," he whispered.

Stealing along the passage, he came to a door on the right. He put his ear against it, and heard the clink of knives and forks mingled with guttural conversation. Creeping back again, he whispered:

"They are feeding. Come along!"

They passed from the storeroom into the chamber which had formerly contained the hoist. Here they noticed a tall heap of earth.

"They dug that out when continuing the underground passage to the bridge," said Pariset.

"Here's the trap-door," returned Kenneth. "Look! There's a wire running through it, connecting with the room behind."

"It's all very thorough, confound them!" said Pariset. "I hope the trap-door won't creak."

They lifted it gently, and found that it moved on a central axis, well oiled. Peering into the dark depths, Kenneth discovered a wooden ladder. They crept down this, into a large underground chamber flagged with stone, and ventilated by narrow gratings in the brick walls, above the level of the stream.

"We had better not both go on," said Pariset. "I'll go up and keep watch. You proceed, and cut the wires at the further end of the passage."

"Why not here?" said Kenneth. "It would save time."

"But if the word should come to fire the mine, and they find the apparatus doesn't work, they'd soon discover the cut here and repair it. Much better do the damage at the other end."

"Very well. You'll use your revolver if they come before I get back?"

"Yes. I'll take my chance. They probably won't guess that there's any one below, if I shut down the trap-door. You know what to do: cut the wire, or disconnect the terminals."

With the trap-door closed, it was pitch dark in the chamber. Kenneth struck a match, and making his way carefully over the flagstones found himself in a narrow passage, which led into another large chamber like the first. This again was connected with a third by a short passage. The floor of the third was heaped with newly excavated earth, and the sole outlet from it was a low tunnel, which a man could enter only by bending low.

Kenneth crept into it, breathing with difficulty in the stuffy atmosphere impregnated with the smell of earth. It seemed endless, and must have cost prodigious labour. On and on he went, his back and legs aching, his breathing more and more oppressed. The thought came to him, what if the tunnel were obstructed

at the further end? When the wire had once been laid, the Germans would have no interest in keeping the passage clear. What if the roof fell upon him? What if--direst possibility of all!--the mine were fired while he was still in the tunnel? At this thought he felt a momentary "sinking," and dropped his match-box. Taking a grip upon himself he waited a few moments until his nerves were steadied, groped for the match-box, struck another match, and went on.

A few yards more brought him to an enlargement of the tunnel, where he could stand upright. And here he found that the wire, laid along the floor, ended in a metal case, which he guessed to contain a detonating apparatus, like the floating mines employed at sea. It was the work of a moment to sever the wire. Then, turning his back on this terrible agent of destruction, Kenneth hurried along as fast as possible towards the open end of the tunnel.

CHAPTER VIII--A FIGHT IN THE MILL

Kenneth returned more quickly than he had gone. He was consumed with a feverish impatience to assure himself of Pariset's safety. Pariset had been very confident; but it was at least within the bounds of possibility that, if discovered by the Germans, he might be overpowered before he had time to fire a warning shot.

When he reached the trap-door he tapped lightly on it. It was raised at once.

"Good!" whispered Pariset. "Is it done?"

"Yes, the wire is cut."

"Capital! You have only been twenty minutes."

"Has anything happened?"

"A minute or two ago there was a ring at the bell, and I heard someone go to the door. I was afraid that some friend of these fellows had discovered the lancers and come to give warning; but it can't be that, because all is quiet."

"Still, he may be a friend, and that will mean that we have six men to deal with instead of five."

"It doesn't matter, now the wire is cut. We had better creep out again, go round by the field, cross the bridge, and join the lancers in an attack on the house."

"Suppose the lancers haven't come!"

"We have to reckon with that possibility, of course; but it's not probable. I'll just reconnoitre again; then we'll get back. If the lancers have not arrived, we must get the assistance of some stout fellows from the farm. I'm determined that these Germans shall not escape."

"Let me go," said Kenneth. "You don't know German; I do; and I might overhear something worth making a note of."

"That's a good notion. We may get on the track of other operations of theirs. Take off your boots; I'll tie them to mine."

A minute later Kenneth tiptoed in his stocking feet along the dark passage. Through the closed door of the kitchen on the left came the sounds of some one moving about. On the other side he heard the voices of the men in the dining-room, the door of which was ajar. Grasping his revolver, he bent his ear towards the opening. At the first words he caught he started. The voice was only too familiar to him. It was the voice of Kurt Hellwig.

Was he there before, Kenneth wondered, or was he the newcomer whose ring Pariset had heard? In a few seconds the point was cleared up.

"Yes," Hellwig was saying, "I had intended to give you the word by wireless myself. But the chief wanted me to come through and see that all was ready. The wire is fixed?"

"I guarantee that," was his friend's reply. "You don't want to go along the tunnel yourself?"

"No, I'll take your word for it. I'm very tired; thought I should never get through. Our friend Spiegel was caught in Liége before my eyes, and taken away to be shot. The soldiers could hardly save him from lynching, the mob was so furious."

"The Belgians are going to be troublesome, then?" said another voice.

"It appears so. We opened the attack on the forts yesterday, and the fools had the audacity to reply. They did some damage, too, worse luck. Von Emmich is attacking again to-day in full force, and with his numbers he'll sweep the idiots away. There'll not be a man left. The orders are to spare nothing and nobody."

"When are we likely to get the word?" asked his friend.

"Probably not at all. If our men are already in Liége, as I expect is the case, we shall leave the bridge intact: the railway will be useful. It is only to be blown up in case of a check, to prevent the Belgians from being reinforced from France. But that's not at all likely."

"I suppose it is true that England has declared war?"

Hellwig's ironical laugh made Kenneth's blood boil.

"Yes, it's true," he said. "It's the chance we've been waiting for for years. They've next to no army; they're never ready; and within a week there'll be a

rebellion in Ireland which will keep the whole of their forces busy. Within a month we shall have France under our heel; then we'll turn back and crush the Russians, who've no organization. Then with the Channel ports in our possession the rest will be easy. By this time next year the Kaiser will be dictating peace in London."

"Well, you ought to know the English; you've lived among them. How they got their empire I can't understand.... Then we shall be leaving here soon? It's quite time."

"What do you mean?"

"It may be all right, but thinking it over I can't help feeling a little suspicious. The beer delivered to-day was brought by two clerks. They said the draymen had been called up, and they were doing duty in their place. It didn't occur to me till they were driving off that the clerks, well-set-up young fellows, were likely to have been called up before the draymen. The man who usually comes is a big fat fellow who couldn't march a mile without collapsing. But nothing has happened, so I suppose I was suspicious for nothing."

"They didn't come into the house?"

"No; the fellow who brought the cask into the lobby didn't seem at all curious. Ah!"

He was interrupted by the ticking of an instrument on a table at the far end of the room. There was silence for a moment as he read the message.

"The bridge is to be blown up," said the man, returning. "At last!"

"Give me a few minutes to finish my meal," said Hellwig. "I've had nothing to eat for twelve hours. A quarter of an hour, say; that won't make any difference. I wish your cook would hurry up."

Kenneth turned to go back, anticipating a possible visit to the kitchen. At the same moment the kitchen door opened, and an old woman bearing a tray came into the passage. The light from the lamp behind her fell on an unfamiliar figure at the door of the dining-room--a bootless man with a revolver in his hand. The woman screamed; the tray fell from her hand, and a pool of soup spread over the floor. There was an outcry in the dining-room; the man nearest the door flung it fully open, to find the muzzle of a revolver within a few inches of his head.

In the moment allowed him for thought, Kenneth had realised that he could not escape if he dashed past the old woman with armed men at his back. With an inward tremor he made up his mind to the bold course.

"Hands up!" he cried, as the startled man recoiled.

The German instantly flung up his hands. But his companions realised the position. One of them sprang across the room to an electric push in the wall. Another, covered by the man who had flinched, whipped out his revolver, and took a snapshot at Kenneth. But a slight movement of the man between them

brought him in the line of fire, and he fell with a bullet through his head.

It was no time for half measures. Kenneth covered his assailant, fired, and brought him down. Through the shrieks of the old woman in the passage there came to his ears a shout of encouragement, and immediately after he had fired his shot Pariset rushed up to the doorway, reaching over Kenneth's shoulder to point his revolver. At the sight of this the three remaining men dashed to the open window and leapt out; the last of them, pausing to close the window, was winged by Pariset's flying shot. Kenneth and his friend sprang across the room, threw the window open, and jumped into the yard. But the brief delay at the window had given the fugitives time to make their escape in the darkness. They were not to be seen.

"The lancers will get them!" Kenneth panted.

"If they've come!" replied Pariset.

He blew his whistle. There was no response. They dashed across the yard, wondering how the Germans could have escaped, for there was no outlet on this side of the house, and the wall was high and spiked. But after a minute or two they discovered a gap in the base of the wall, large enough to admit a man crawling. On the outside it was concealed by long grass and weeds. Wriggling through this they sprinted along by the wall to the road. And then they heard the distant galloping of a troop of horsemen. Pariset blew his whistle again, and in a few seconds a half squadron of Belgian lancers reined up.

"Three men have escaped," cried Pariset. "Round them up!"

The horsemen galloped off, some along the road, some along the grassy bank of the stream, the rest into the field beyond the hedge.

"A pity they were late," said Pariset, walking slowly with Kenneth back to the house. "When I heard your shot I expected that they'd force the door and rush in."

"I hope they will catch the Germans," said Kenneth. "One of them--it was the last comer, the man whose ring at the bell you heard--was Hellwig. I shall be particularly disgusted if he gets off."

"What led to the row? You weren't rash enough to attack them?"

"No; but I wasn't so careful as I ought to have been, I'm afraid. You see, hearing no knives and forks going, I thought they had finished their meal, and everything was cleared away, and didn't expect any danger from the kitchen. As soon as I knew there was something preparing for Hellwig I backed, straight into the old woman with a tray. It was all up then, of course."

"You've had a lucky escape. But we have saved the bridge."

"One of the fellows dashed to an electric push," said Kenneth, smiling. "I was too busy to notice how he looked when the explosion he expected didn't happen, but I've no doubt it was the surprise of his life."

"We'll have a look round. I'll give the old woman a soothing explanation, and borrow a lamp."

Their investigation added little to their knowledge. The luggage of the spies contained no papers bearing on espionage. But the wireless installation, carried up inside the chimney, was very powerful. The electrical apparatus for firing the mine was in perfect order.

"There is nothing amateurish about it," said Pariset. "This is spying reduced to a science."

It was some time before the lancers returned. They brought with them the man who had been wounded as he sprang through the window. The others had got away. The man who had fired at Kenneth was dead; his comrade, to whom he owed his death, Kenneth had wounded.

After consultation with the captain of lancers, it was decided to leave a dozen men to occupy the mill, pending the receipt of instructions from headquarters. Kenneth and Pariset begged a lodging for the night from the old miller, who was delighted at the success of their scheme, and lavishly hospitable.

CHAPTER IX--IN THE TRENCHES

Next morning the two friends flew into Charleroi. The town was seething with excitement. People were laughing and singing, cheering every soldier who passed along the street, congratulating each other on the good news. It had become known that the fierce German assaults of the previous day on Liége had been beaten back by the guns of the forts and the steady rifle fire of the men in the trenches, and that the Germans had asked for an armistice.

"Splendid!" said Pariset, when he learnt the news from a brother officer: "though we mustn't crow too soon. The cessation of the attack gives us the chance I wanted, then. We can take advantage of it to get into Liége. I should like to report our little coup in person."

"There will be no difficulty in my getting away, I suppose?" asked Kenneth.

"What do you wish to do?"

"Get to England and join the Flying Corps."

"They would take you?"

"Well, my chest measures thirty-six inches, my teeth are sound, and I've no varicose veins. The only doubt is about my sight: my right eye is a trifle astigmatic. But I think I should pass the doctor."

"I wish you could stay with us. But I understand your wish to serve with your own army. As soon as we get back I'll ask the commandant if I can be spared to carry you to Ostend."

Kenneth agreed to this, and they started eastward. It was nearing midday when they swooped down from a great height on to an open space some three miles west of Liége. Pariset had pointed out the positions of the forts as they descended; but Kenneth had been able barely to distinguish them while in the air, and when he came to the ground they were quite out of sight.

But the intervening space had been carefully prepared for infantry. Trenches had been dug, barbed wire entanglements stretched from point to point, every natural feature adapted to the purposes of defence. At the present moment the trenches were not manned. Pariset learnt from a comrade in the flying corps that though the armistice had been refused, the Germans had not as yet renewed the attack. Their losses on the previous day had been very heavy, and the garrison were confident of their ability to repulse any further assaults if the Germans persisted in attacking in the same dense masses, and were not supported by heavier artillery than that which they had employed hitherto.

Kenneth listened eagerly to the conversation between the two airmen. He learnt how the German infantry, covered by artillery, had advanced again and again in close formation, only to be hurled back by the fire from the forts and the trenches, followed up with the bayonet. The Belgians were amazed at the doggedness with which their enemy had pressed on, careless of cover, though great gaps were torn in their packed columns. Such a wastage of men pointed to a vast confidence in the ultimate superiority of numbers, the crushing of the defence by sheer weight rather than skill.

Pariset explained, when Kenneth questioned him, the importance to the enemy of the capture of Liége. Encircled by its twelve forts, constructed by the engineering genius of General Brialmont, the town stood as a formidable obstacle to the advance of the Germans through the valley of the Meuse, the easiest way into France. Every day it could be held was a day's delay in the prosecution of the enemy's plan of campaign, which, as everybody knew, was to crush France before Russia had time to threaten Germany on her eastern border.

"The Germans have, they think, a very perfect military machine," Pariset continued; "I daresay they have, though perhaps they are a little too cocksure about it. They've had no experience of war for forty years, and their easy victory

in 1870 has possibly produced what you call swelled head. Anyhow, the most perfect machine may be dislocated by a little grit, and Liége, we hope, will be the little grit for the occasion. Now we had better get some lunch; then we'll fly north. I'll report myself to my commandant, and ask for leave to carry you to Ostend."

They walked away to the rear of the lines, towards a cottage on which the canteen flag was flying. Before they reached it they met a general officer on horseback, cantering along accompanied by an aide-de-camp. Pariset saluted, the officers touched their hats and passed.

"General Leman, commanding the forts," said Pariset.

"He looked just like an Englishman," Kenneth replied.

Pariset smiled, and was beginning a chaffing remark when he was hailed from behind. Turning, he saw that the officers had reined up, and turned their horses' flanks towards him. He hurried back, Kenneth taking a step or two in the same direction.

"Lieutenant Pariset, I understand?" he heard the general say. "I compliment you on your little exploit. You did very well; thank you!"

Pariset murmured something, saluted again, and the officers rode off.

"He didn't give me time to tell him about you," said Pariset, rejoining his friend. "He is evidently in a hurry to get back to Fort Loncin."

"It doesn't matter about me," said Kenneth. "How did he know about it at all?"

"He must have got the news by telegram or wireless from Charleroi. But really it was your doing, you know. I must make that clear."

"Don't talk rubbish! I only gave you the information. I liked the look of him. What keen eyes he has!"

"He's a splendid fellow. But come along! Our men are a hungry lot, and I don't want to find the board cleared."

They were sitting at lunch among a group of cheery young officers when a bugle rang out. The officers sprang up, seized their arms, and rushed out of the cottage.

"The Germans are coming on again," cried Pariset. "Come and see."

They ran back towards the trenches, which were already filling with riflemen. A deep boom sounded from some distant spot.

"A German gun!" said Pariset.

"I don't see the shell," said Kenneth, looking round.

"My dear fellow, it had fallen somewhere before we heard the sound. Ah! the forts are replying."

In a few minutes the silence of the summer noon was shattered by the continuous thunder of artillery. With the deep slow booms of the big guns was mingled the quicker, sharper bang of machine guns somewhere out of sight.

"Get down, you asses!" cried an officer, as they drew near to the trenches. "Do you want to be marked?"

They took cover behind a hedge. Kenneth tingled from top to toe as he heard the crash of the guns, and felt the earth and the very air shake with the concussion. Presently a shrill whistle sounded; it was followed almost instantaneously by a prolonged crackle, which had hardly died away when from above them came a zip, zip, zip, like the notes of some tuneless bird.

"The Germans are firing anyhow," said Pariset in an involuntary whisper.

Round the hedge came swiftly two men in blue coats with the red cross on their sleeves, carrying an ambulance. A groan rose from it.

"I can't stand this," said Pariset.

He dashed along the hedge and into the open. Kenneth instinctively followed him, not doubting for a moment what it was that Pariset could not stand. Pariset, with Kenneth close at his heels, made straight for the nearest trench, heedless of the shot and shell whistling, singing, crashing around them. They flung themselves into the trench, and Kenneth, without understanding how it had happened, found himself leaning forward, rifle in hand, listening to a droning monotone from Pariset a yard to the left of him.

"Mark your man.... Don't be in a hurry.... Keep your head as low as possible.... You'll soon get used to the noise."

It was a minute or two before Kenneth realised that the rifle had been thrust into his hand for use. Looking over the parapet of the trench he was still confused and bewildered. Pariset expected him to fire, but where was the enemy? He saw the long grass waving in the breeze, a few scattered trees in the field beyond, wisps and cloudlets of smoke--and then, as the range of his vision increased, in the far distance a bluish-grey mass rolling like a billow towards him.

At last he understood. That bluish-grey mass was the enemy. It represented brute force, broken faith, merciless tyranny. It was the devastating flood which these brave soldiers about him were giving their lives to check.

Presently he distinguished individuals in the mass.

"Mark your man!"

The words, coolly spoken by Pariset on his left, set his imagination on fire. It was his privilege to have a share in their fight for freedom. He laid the rifle to his shoulder, marked his man along the sight, and a touch of his finger sped a bullet on its way.

For the next half-hour Kenneth lost account of everything but the task so suddenly thrust upon him. The deafening din of bursting shells and rifle fire, the quick silent activity of the ambulance bearers, the shouts and groans of men, were unnoticed by him in his constant preoccupation. He learnt afterwards how the Germans had pressed on with marvellous passive courage under the hail of lead

and shell from the forts and trenches; how the gaps cleft in their close-packed ranks had been instantly filled up, as if men had sprung out of the earth. He fired until the chamber was empty, refilled and fired again, every now and again hearing Pariset's monotonous cry, "Mark your man!"

Presently there was a shrill whistle. Instantly, in the trench on either side of him, the men who had been lying flat sprang to their feet and dashed forward with a joyous shout. He was up and after them, running across the field, with bayonet out-thrust, towards the stalwart men in blue-grey, who had hitherto come nearer and nearer like the irresistible tide. But now he became suddenly conscious that the tide was receding. These stout warriors whom shot and shell had failed to daunt had turned tail at the sight of gleaming steel. Their ranks broke; they wavered, spun round, and fled in panic disorder across the field.

As Kenneth, with parched lips and trembling limbs, returned with Pariset from that victorious charge, an officer of the general's staff met them.

"This will never do, lieutenant," he said to Pariset; "we have plenty of brave fellows to man the trenches, but we haven't too many airmen, and we can't afford to risk them in field operations. You have no business here, you know."

"But wasn't it glorious, colonel?" said Pariset, glowing.

"They are men to be proud of. But I am quite serious; get back to your corps; there will be plenty of work for you. Has this man no uniform, by the way?"

"They have run short, colonel," said Pariset instantly. "We will rig him up in a day or two."

"See to it. If the Germans capture a man in civilian dress they will shoot him at sight. Now, get back at once."

"I thought it better not to go into particulars," Pariset remarked to Kenneth as they went on. "There might have been a row."

"It's just as well," said Kenneth. "But, I say, I think I'll go into the infantry after all."

CHAPTER X--BROKEN THREADS

On returning to his headquarters, some eight miles west of the town, Pariset asked permission of his commandant to convey Kenneth to Ostend. He met with a peremptory refusal; he could not be spared.

"You'll have to go by train," he said to Kenneth. "It will take you a long time, the railway is so congested with troops and refugees. Must you go?"

"What else can I do?"

"Well, we're short of men. I'd like to keep you. If I get you a sort of appointment, will you stay?"

"Rather! It might be months before I got a job at home."

"Then I'll see the commandant again and try to arrange it."

When he returned half-an-hour later, Kenneth knew by his expression that he had been successful.

"It was easier than I expected," he said. "He was good enough to say that you're just the man we want. He told me, too, that we have already accepted the services of two English airmen who have volunteered, so everything is quite in order. We'll go into Liége and get you a suit of overalls. I am delighted."

After the necessary purchases had been made, they went into the Hôtel de l'Europe for dinner. The dining-room was crowded, and Kenneth, as he entered, glanced somewhat confusedly around the tables. Suddenly he heard his name, uttered in a low tone, and turning round in surprise, saw Granger beckoning him to a small table at which he sat alone.

"There's room here for you both, at a squeeze," he said. "I'm glad to see you again."

"It's all right, then?" asked Kenneth as they sat down.

"Oh yes! They got a reassuring telegram from my chief this morning. What's more, I am to stay in Liége for the present; I am lent to the Belgians."

"That's capital. I have lent myself."

"'Loan oft loses both itself and friend.' I hope it won't be so in our case! Well, what have you been doing?"

Kenneth plunged into an account of the affair at the mill. Granger interrupted him when the waiter came for orders, and again when the man returned with the dishes. At the conclusion of the story, which Kenneth gave only in outline, Granger said:

"Hellwig is in Liége. My own stay here is not unconnected with him. He is one of the most resourceful, ingenious and dangerous of the thousands of spies in the German service.... They were all County Kerry men, and when they stood at attention you might have heard a pin drop."

His companions stared at him in amazement. His last sentence, apparently unconnected with what had gone before, had been spoken without change of voice or expression, and he imperturbably sucked his lemon squash through a straw before he went on:

"He has a marvellous command of languages; is Protean in his disguises; and in nimbleness of wit outdoes any other German I have ever come across.... They mixed the salad with engine oil, and when Lady Barbara took a mouthful of it, she swallowed it without blinking, and remarked to me, 'The chef is a perfect marvel in inventing new flavours.' ... Waiter!"

"Monsieur?" said the waiter, smiling and bowing.

"Another lemon squash."

When the waiter had gone, Granger said:

"I must have that fellow arrested."

"What on earth for?" asked Pariset.

"And what are you driving at, with your County Kerries and your Lady Barbaras?" said Kenneth.

"The waiter has been hovering round a little more closely than the most officious garçon need do. You didn't notice him, perhaps? He speaks pretty good French, with a strong Belgian accent. Did you see what happened when I called him?"

"What was it?" asked Kenneth.

"I put something of the parade ground tone into my voice, and the fellow brought his heels together in the correct German style. One could almost hear the click. Well greased as his hair is, you can see it trying to rise *en brosse*, and I caught him just now twirling an invisible moustache."

"A spy?"

"Unless my instinct and my judgment are equally at fault. But here he comes; don't be surprised if I break off into irrelevancies; answer in kind."

The waiter placed the glass on the table, and withdrew, to attend to a man at the next table.

"As I was saying," Granger went on, "Hellwig is here, in what shape I don't know, but I hope to catch him yet. Your friend Finkelstein, by the way, has been arrested in Cologne and thrown into prison."

"Good heavens! Not through me, I hope," said Kenneth.

"On a charge of espionage, at any rate. I have no doubt he owes that to ... Yes, it was a very dark night, and he didn't recognise me until I was as near to him as I am to you. Then ... he owes it to Hellwig."

"But what can his motive be? He's his cousin."

"The nearer the bone ... Finkelstein has a daughter, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Well, what more natural than that Hellwig should be appointed trustee to his cousin's daughter and manager of the business?"

"I did suspect that he wants to marry Frieda."

"Ah! Motive enough! ... Waiter!"

The others watched the man. His manner was a strange compound of two servilities--the waiter's and the German private's.

"Monsieur?"

"Bring coffee."

The waiter departed.

"I must certainly have him arrested," said Granger. "So you see, my dear fellow, that if I manage to lay Hellwig by the heels I shall perhaps be able to make you some return for what I owe you."

"But that won't release Max Finkelstein."

"I confess I was at that moment thinking of the daughter," said Granger with a whimsical look at Kenneth. Pariset glanced at his friend and smiled.

"The idea of her marrying that cur!" said Kenneth.

"It won't bear thinking of, will it?" said Granger. "That fellow is rather long with the coffee."

They waited, discussing the probable course of the war. After a while Granger summoned the head waiter.

"Our waiter has been over long fetching our coffee," he said. "Will you stir him up?"

In a minute or two the head waiter returned, carrying the coffee himself.

"Pardon, messieurs," he said. "Gustave was suddenly taken sick, and is not able to serve at present."

"I have lost this trick," said Granger ruefully, when they were again alone. "While I had my eye on the German, he evidently had his eye on me. And for once the German was the quicker to act. Well, we all have our ups and downs--I might have said our exits and our entrances: exit spy, enter staff-officer, who is looking for you, Monsieur Pariset, if I am not mistaken."

A Belgian captain was threading his way across the room, looking quickly from table to table, here and there acknowledging or returning a greeting, but briefly, in the manner of one preoccupied. His glance suddenly falling on Pariset, he smiled, and came directly towards him.

"I heard that you were here," he said. "Have you finished?"

"Yes."

"Then give me a minute privately."

His eyes rested for a moment on Kenneth and Granger, whom he did not know.

"Certainly," said Pariset. "Let me introduce my friends."

The introduction made, the officer's manner changed.

"Let us all go into the smoking-room together," he said. "The matter I've to speak about need be no secret among us four."

"You'll excuse me," said Granger, whose tact never failed. "I have one or two things to attend to; I hope I may have the pleasure some other time."

He left the others, and they made their way to the smoking-room.

CHAPTER XI--THE CENTRE ARCH

"You know the railway bridge over the Ourthe, at Sy, just south of Hamoir?" the captain began, lighting a cigarette.

"Yes," said Pariset.

"A section of our sappers were told off to blow it up this morning. Their work was only half done when they were surprised and cut up by a patrol of Uhlans. The Germans very quickly repaired the damage, and are now using the line to bring up troops and material against the Boncelles and Embourg forts."

"Well?" said Pariset, as the officer paused.

"It occurred to the Chief that you who had saved one bridge might perhaps destroy another. It is a mere suggestion, not a command. The work would be very risky; it is not your job, and all that part of the country is in German hands.

But when the matter was mentioned I said I thought you would at least make a reconnaissance and learn what prospect there is of a successful attempt."

"Of course," said Pariset at once. "You don't know exactly how much damage was done?"

"No. Perhaps a bomb or two would complete it."

"That is rather doubtful," said Pariset musingly. "The chances of hitting the bridge at the right spot from an aeroplane flying very high at speed are slight, and we should have to fly high to escape the German shot."

"Unless we flew in the Taube," suggested Kenneth. "In that we might get low enough to smash the bridge before they suspected us."

"The objection to that is that you would be in almost as great danger from our own guns as from the German," said the captain. "The forts would certainly fire on you. But stay: if you decide on that, I will 'phone the southern forts to pass a Taube showing the Russian flag. That would protect you until you are clear of our lines."

"Very well," said Pariset. "We will start early in the morning. Do you mind getting us a Russian flag while I talk over things with my friend?"

"Not at all. I will bring it to you here."

He left them.

"It is frightfully risky," said Pariset, "but we must make the attempt. We must wear German uniforms. Your friend Granger's will come in handy."

"You have practised bomb-dropping, of course," said Kenneth.

"Yes, but, as I said, it's a most uncertain thing. Besides the difficulty of hitting the vulnerable spot, the bombs sometimes do little damage. We might drop a dozen, and yet fail to destroy the bridge. It's essentially a job to be done on terra firma."

"It's not likely we should be able to land. Even if there is at the moment no considerable force in the neighbourhood the bridge is sure to be guarded."

"That's certain. Still, it's just as well to be provided for the off chance, so I'll take, along with the ordinary bombs, a small case of gelignite and a little electric battery--a pick-axe, too: that may be useful."

"How far is it?"

"About twenty miles. The bridge is at a narrow gorge by the village of Simon's Inn. There's a tunnel beyond, and the banks of the river are steep. The railway crosses the river several times, but I'm pretty sure of the particular bridge they have tried to destroy."

They waited nearly an hour before the captain returned.

"I have had the greatest difficulty in getting the flag," he said, placing a parcel in Pariset's hands. "I tried several shops in vain, then it occurred to me to apply at the Russian consulate, and they happened to have a spare one. I wish you luck.

Report to me at head-quarters."

At seven o'clock next morning, equipped with the needful apparatus, they ascended from their headquarters in the Taube monoplane, took an easterly course, then swung southward and passed between the Flemelle and Boncelles forts. It was a beautiful summer morning. The country was bathed in sunlight, and no warlike sounds disturbed the still air. But south of the town clouds of dust hung over every road, and they caught sight of masses of men moving northward, the sun glinting on weapons and the spikes of helmets. Pariset, in the observer's seat, felt sick at heart. How was it possible for the little Belgian army to resist these immense hordes?

The well-known shape of the aeroplane (they no longer showed the Russian flag) purchased immunity. They flew over the railway, then over the Meuse north of Huy, then sweeping to the east soon came in sight of the Ourthe winding between meadows and precipitous cliffs, and the railway to Neufchâteau. The valley broadened out. Instructed by Pariset, Kenneth steered the monoplane over the village of Hamoir on the left bank. Almost immediately afterwards they came above the cluster of houses at Sy, and the bridge crossing the gorge, beyond which the railway entered the tunnel.

On the north side of the bridge stood a long goods train, apparently waiting the signal to proceed. On the south side, part in, part out of the tunnel, was a train of passenger coaches, gaily bedecked with leafy branches of trees. A few soldiers had got out of the train, and were sitting smoking in the meadow. At each end of the bridge four guards were posted.

The aeroplane passed over the cliff through which the tunnel ran, then bore to the left in the direction of Werbomont and was soon out of sight from the bridge. Choosing a lonely field sheltered by a wood, Kenneth brought the machine to the ground.

"We can't destroy the bridge with bombs," said Pariset, "but it's just possible to do it with the gelignite if you are game."

"What's your idea?" asked Kenneth.

"There's clearly a block on the line somewhere to the north. It may be a long time before it is cleared, giving us just the opportunity we want. There's a path through the fields on the left bank, leading to the bridge. It seems fairly covered. My idea is that you should go down to the bridge with the gelignite."

"But it is guarded," Kenneth interrupted.

"Don't be impatient. I was going on to say that I will fly over the bridge and stampede the guards. That will give you a chance to creep up. Your uniform will protect you long enough for the purpose, I hope. The Germans won't suspect you until the explosion occurs. Then it will be a ticklish moment. The fellows who have got out of the train may fire at you; but they are a good distance away, and

you ought to have time to rush back under cover before they can do any damage. I'll be ready to pick you up. Or, if you like, I'll take the gelignite and you drop the bombs."

"No. I've had no practice at that. I'll take my chance. But we're about two miles from the bridge, I fancy. It will take me at least half an hour to get there, not knowing the way. Anything may happen in that time."

"I'll come with you until we find a guide. There will be plenty of time for me to come back to the aeroplane and still reach the bridge before you. I will give you half an hour from now before I fly off."

They set off together, walking rapidly over the fields. Turning into a lane, they came suddenly face to face with a farm boy of about sixteen years. His jaw dropped, and a look of terror showed in his eyes when he saw the German uniforms. Pariset spoke to him rapidly in Walloon, and gave him money. Thus reassured, he agreed to conduct Kenneth across the hill to the path which Pariset had mentioned.

"Good luck!" said Pariset, as they parted. "Don't risk too much. If the stratagem fails, make your way back to the same spot."

Kenneth carried the gelignite and the battery. He gave the pick-axe to the boy. Pariset had learnt from him that no Germans had been seen on the lanes and roads, but they walked across the fields under cover of the hedgerows in case patrols or foraging parties should appear.

Their course brought them within half an hour to a field some little distance above the bridge. Kenneth dismissed the boy, and keeping under cover to avoid observation from the trains, which were stationary in the places where he had seen them forty minutes before, he crept as near to the bridge as he dared, and waited. He heard the water lapping the piers, the voices of the guards at the nearer end, the distant hiss of the locomotive of the troop train blowing off steam--and then a faint deep *burr*, growing louder moment by moment.

The guards raised their voices.

"Another Taube," said one.

"He's flying very high," said another. "Thinks we are Belgians, perhaps."

"But he's coming down," said the third. "Look at that swoop! It fairly makes me sick to see him."

Kenneth, posted under cover, was not yet able to see the aeroplane, but from the silence that fell upon the guards he guessed that Pariset was executing one of those steep dives which make the onlooker hold his breath.

"I hope he won't come too low," he thought.

And then, in pursuance of the plan arranged, he began to steal along the bank of the river towards the bridge, confident that the attention of the guards was riveted on the aeroplane. He saw it now, sweeping round in a huge circle,

still at a great height.

When the expected signal came, it was startling in its suddenness. Kenneth had not seen an object fall from the aeroplane, but there was a sharp explosion just beyond the bridge, a cloud of dust, and cries of amazement and fear from the guards. He moved nearer to the bridge. From the direction of the troop train he heard the crackle of rifles. The eyes of the guards were still turned upwards upon the monoplane, which was circling round at a height of three or four thousand feet above the bridge, within range, indeed, but a difficult target.

Taking advantage of the excitement of the men, Kenneth had crept through the scrub on the river bank and come beneath the end of the bridge. He had already perceived that the stone arch at each end had been destroyed, but the centre arch was intact, and the gaps had been covered with stout balks of timber on which the railway track was laid. His aim must be to destroy the central arch. With that broken down, to repair the bridge a second time would be a much more difficult matter.

Covered now by the bridge, he waded out to the central arch, carrying his apparatus. He had supposed that it would be necessary to hack out with the pick-axe a hole in the masonry large enough to hold the case of gelignite, and the risk of being heard strung his nerves to a high tension. It was with great relief that he discovered a hole already made. Apparently a charge had been laid there by the Belgian engineers, but it had failed to explode, and probably had been removed by the Germans.

He lost no time in wedging the case of gelignite into the cavity, attached the detonator, and waded back to the bank. There was now almost continuous rifle fire from the troops, who had alighted from the train and lined up on the track. The incessant noise smothered the whirr of the propeller, but it was clear that Pariset was still absorbing the attention of the Germans. Kenneth crept along up stream, paying out the wire as he went, until he reached the shelter of a dense thicket. Then he made the connection with the battery. Instantaneously there was a deafening roar, the arch collapsed, and the whole bridge fell with a crash into the river.

Somewhat breathless, Kenneth remained hidden for a minute. The rifle shots had ceased; there was a confused shouting from the troops; and through it he heard again the hum of the aeroplane. A bomb burst on the ground near the end of the bridge. The fusillade recommenced. Seizing the opportunity, Kenneth quitted his hiding-place, and made the best of his way back across the field, observing that Pariset was still circling round in order to distract the enemy, but rising ever higher.

When Kenneth reached the rendezvous Pariset was awaiting him.

"Hullo! You're wounded!" cried Kenneth, noticing that Pariset was grasping

his right wrist.

"Bruised by a splinter, that's all," said Pariset. "It's painful, but not dangerous. The planes are riddled; I'm very lucky to have fared, no worse. You managed that splendidly, Ken. I was surprised you did it so quickly."

"There was already a cavity in the arch, which saved labour."

"We have both earned our dinner. You will pilot the machine back?"

"Of course. Are you sure you are not seriously hurt?"

"Quite. I only hope I get nothing worse before the war is over."

CHAPTER XII--A FIGHT WITH A ZEPPELIN

Nearing Liége on their return journey, the airmen became aware of a momentous change from the peaceful scene of the morning. A pall of smoke hung over the country for miles. Wherever there were rifts in it, they caught glimpses of immense grey masses that appeared to be crawling towards the city from every side except the west. It was evident that the Germans were attacking in stupendous force.

Kenneth steered to the west, doubtful whether he should find the headquarters of the Flying Corps in the spot where he had left it. The monoplane escaped the Germans' attentions, and when it came within range of the Belgians' rifles, Pariset hung out the Russian flag, which was his surety.

Locating the aeroplane park with some difficulty, considerably to the westward of its former position, Kenneth at length brought the machine to the ground. The air quivered with the shock of artillery fire; the noise was incessant.

"What is the news?" asked Pariset of a comrade who had come up to greet him.

"They are shelling us with heavy guns, and devoting particular attention to Fort Loncin, where General Leman is," was the reply. "And it is said that they have got into the town. The people are making off in crowds.... You have had a knock!"

"A slight bruise. We managed it!"

"What?" asked his friend, who was unaware of his errand.

"Blew up the bridge above Sy, and held back a troop train, for the rest of the day, I hope. I must go and report to the chief; tell you all about it later."

In giving in his report Pariset did not fail to emphasise the hazardous part that Kenneth had had in the operation. The commandant complimented them both, and made an entry against Kenneth's name in his notebook. Then he said:

"We have had our first encounter with a Zeppelin, and unluckily had the worst of it. The Zeppelin was reconnoitring, and Boissel went in pursuit. The crew opened fire with their machine guns when he was manoeuvring for position, and a shot smashed his arm. He managed to land, and then collapsed. The machine was slightly buckled up in coming to ground, and will be useless for a day or two."

"I'm sorry for Boissel," said Pariset. "He will be cut up at being knocked out so soon. Has the Zeppelin been seen since?"

"No. The forts opened fire upon it, apparently without success, for it sailed away to the north-east."

"Shall we tackle it if it comes back?" Pariset asked eagerly.

"Hadn't you better rest? You have done a good day's work already, and I don't want to lose you as well as Boissel."

"To tell the truth, our job at the bridge has whetted my appetite, and I am sure Amory is ready for another go."

"Whenever you please," said Kenneth.

"Very well," said the commandant. "But I beg that you won't be rash. Boissel was a little too eager--a pardonable fault; but prudence is a positive merit."

"We will be discretion itself," said Pariset.

Kenneth smiled; he did not know Boissel, but he could not imagine any airman more likely to show reckless daring than his friend.

They snatched a meal, then set about their preparations. The Zeppelin being manned with a numerous crew armed with rifles and machine guns, and equipped for bomb-throwing, it was axiomatic that the aeroplane must try to accomplish by superior speed, climbing power, and manageability what it could not hope to achieve by force. If it were a mere question of manoeuvring the advantage would lie with the aeroplane. The Zeppelin would be at a disadvantage in that it presented a bulkier target.

After a hurried discussion--for the Zeppelin might return at any moment--the two airmen decided to get a number of bombs with time fuses, and to fix in front of the pilot's seat a small petrol lamp, sheltering it from the wind by a zinc screen that would almost enclose it; the fuse could be lit from this.

"It won't be wise to trust to bombs exploding by contact," he explained. "They might miss the mark, big as it is; and the envelope of the airship is so fragile that it is quite possible for a bomb to pass through it without exploding."

"But wouldn't the gas escape through the rent, and the thing collapse?" Ken-

neth asked.

"The envelope consists of several compartments, and one might be injured without affecting the others."

"You won't try rifle shots?"

"Very little use, my son. We should only bore a few holes in it. Their Mausers would be much more dangerous to us. We shouldn't have the slightest chance against them, any more than a torpedo boat would have against a Dreadnought, so far as armament is concerned. But I am simply panting for the chance to match the aeroplane against the airship. I hope they'll come back."

"I dare say they will, having got off scot free before. We must be ready to fly off at a moment's notice. The Zeppelin is very fast, I've heard."

"But no match for my machine. We'll use that instead of the Taube. I'm more used to it; it is faster and better for bomb-dropping."

"You won't pilot it, surely!"

"Indeed I shall! My arm doesn't bother me much, and you know I have had much more experience than you."

"I've had absolutely no experience of bomb-throwing," Kenneth protested.

"Well, you play golf, don't you? Do you remember the first time you went round?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Simply that, like everybody else, you probably got round in fewer strokes than you did for months afterwards."

"That's true; and very sickening it is. I'll do my best, then."

When everything was ready, they sat on the grass beside the aeroplane, scanning the sky for the Zeppelin. Kenneth, it must be confessed, was less impatient than Pariset, whose mercurial temperament ill-brooked a waiting game. He was constantly up and down, snatching up his field-glasses every few seconds, "fidgeting about," as Kenneth said to himself.

It was drawing towards evening when, just as Pariset had dropped his field-glasses with a gesture of annoyance, a messenger came running from the commandant to say that the Zeppelin had been sighted.

"How does he know?" asked Pariset, incredulously.

"He had word by field telephone," was the answer. "The airship is coming from the north-east."

Pariset instantly started his engine. But before the aeroplane was aloft, the airship appeared in the distant sky, like a torpedo of the air. There was a certain fascination in its swift and steady approach, growing bigger and bigger to the sight. Its course would bring it within half a mile of the portable sheds; perhaps its object was to destroy the Belgian aeroplanes.

Having a reasonable respect for the Zeppelin's machine guns, Pariset at first

kept well away from its course. He bore to the east, so as to avoid a direct meeting with it, and to get between it and its base. That the aeroplane had already been seen from the airship, high above it, was proved by the smack of several bullets upon parts of its structure; but they had not heard the crackle of the rifles, what with the whirr of their engine and the incessant thunder of artillery.

Comparing notes afterwards, they agreed that their first impression was wonder at the speed and accuracy with which the Germans had got their range. Pariset at once flew off at a wider angle, trusting to his superior speed to carry him out of danger until he had had time to rise above the Zeppelin. He could climb only gradually, if he was to take full advantage of his speed. It was nearly ten minutes before Kenneth reported that they were about equal with it in height. The airship was now at least two miles astern, and had slightly altered its direction. Pariset now swung round. He guessed that the Zeppelin was making for Fort Loncin, probably to reconnoitre, for its bombs would have little or no effect on the armoured cupola of the fort. Flying back, he steered so as to approach the airship on its flank, and succeeded in his aim of showing the enemy that the aeroplane was to be reckoned with. It again altered its course; Pariset shifted his rudder also; and the Zeppelin gave chase.

Bullets whistled around the aeroplane, which by this time had risen several hundred feet higher than the enemy. Adjusting his planes to secure the maximum lift, Pariset began to climb steeply, and for some minutes the Zeppelin gained on him in horizontal direction. But the rapidity of his ascent rendered the task of its marksmen very difficult; and they seemed to realise that they were themselves in danger, for they altered their course, bearing to the east, as if they had abandoned the chase.

The parts were now reversed. The aeroplane became the hunter, the airship the hunted. Still rising, Pariset gradually reduced the horizontal distance between them, gaining assistance from the manoeuvres of the Zeppelin, which yawed now and again in order to bring its guns to bear more effectively, thus losing pace. The aeroplane began to close in with it, and Pariset suddenly became aware that he was closing in too rapidly, for the airship either stopped her engines or reduced their speed. Before he had time to meet the manoeuvre he had come within effective range. Bullets pattered around like hail, and only by a swift wheeling movement did he escape destruction.

Learning caution, he rose still higher, until he estimated that he was at least 3000 feet above the enemy. At this elevation the swelling bulk of the envelope rendered the machine guns useless, and there was indeed little chance of the aeroplane's being hit even by the rifles.

Pariset's object was now to get as nearly as possible vertically above the Zeppelin, which the Zeppelin could only prevent by constantly changing its

course and its speed. But Pariset was an adept in the handling of his machine. He watched every twist and turn of the enemy, and seemed to Kenneth to anticipate them, as a skilful boxer anticipates the feints and rallies of his opponent.

"Get ready!" he shouted to Kenneth at last. "A twenty-second fuse!"

Kenneth grasped the bomb, leaning over his seat ready to drop it at the word. He had lost all sense that this was warfare, and throbbed with the same excitement as stirs the batsman or the three-quarter.

"Now!" cried Pariset.

The bomb fell plumb, but at the same instant the Zeppelin checked, and the bomb burst many yards ahead, though whether above or below the airship he could not tell. Pariset at once wheeled round, and within a few seconds brought his machine once more above the enemy. At the critical moment Kenneth dropped a second bomb. There was a flash and a burst of smoke and metal between the two vessels, momentarily hiding the lower from view. But that no harm had been done was proved by the Zeppelin shooting ahead on another tack.

"A little too far away," cried Pariset. "No time to descend. Throw the next, don't drop it."

In its efforts to escape the fate which threatened it the Zeppelin was now keeping a straight course. Its skipper evidently realised that in moving from side to side it enlarged the area of possible disaster. A third time the aeroplane soared over it, and though its engines were instantly stopped, its length was fatal. Kenneth threw the bomb with all his force. The result evoked from Pariset a shout of exultation. The bomb burst a few yards to the right of the airship. For a second or two the effect of the explosion was, as it were, in suspense. Then there was a burst of flame; the body of the enormous vessel beneath them slowly crumpled up; with incredible rapidity it lost all shape; the formless mass became smaller to their sight; and in a few seconds a cloud of dust at an incalculable distance below showed the now horrified airmen where the wreck had struck the earth.

[image]

THE END OF THE ZEPPELIN

CHAPTER XIII--THE GREAT GUNS

After the fight Pariset steered over the town at a great altitude, and Kenneth employed his field-glasses in the hope of picking up some information.

"I say," he called, "it looks very much as if the Germans are really in the town. Firing has stopped."

"They can't have taken the forts already," cried Pariset. "We'll get back."

On coming to the ground miles to the west, they learnt that Kenneth was right: the Germans had entered the town, lined all the bridges with sentries, taken possession of the railway station, and begun to billet themselves. It was rumoured also that Fort Loncin had fallen, that General Leman was a prisoner, and that the Belgian field army was concentrated about Fort Lantin, north of the town.

The officers of the Flying Corps were deeply dejected. All the efforts of their gallant men seemed to have been thrown away. Their thoughts being centred on Liége alone, they did not as yet realise that the strenuous resistance to the passage of the German army had dislocated the imperial plans, and caused a delay in the march on Paris which was destined to save Europe.

Kenneth and his friend were taking their evening meal in a village inn, the owner of which had announced that next day he intended to pack up and start for Ostend. Only a few peasants were on the premises; all the more well-to-do of the villagers had already joined the stream of refugees.

Suddenly there was a shot outside. The innkeeper dived into his cellar; his guests jumped up, grasping their revolvers. The door opened, and a man in the coarse soiled clothes of a farm labourer entered. On his head was a wide-brimmed slouch hat, and the lower part of his face was concealed by a tangled brown moustache and beard.

"What was that shot?" asked Pariset, in Walloon, and gasped with amazement when the stranger, taking off his hat, said in perfect English:

"Here is a part of its track."

He pointed to two bullet-holes, one on each side of the crown of the hat.

"Granger!" exclaimed Kenneth.

"A very good disguise, isn't it?" said Granger. "But there is little time to spare. The bullet is in an amiable Teuton who popped round the corner at an unfortunate moment--for him. No doubt he was shadowing me: I must make another change in my outward favour, that is clear. His confederate missed me and winged the accomplice. I couldn't catch the fellow. Probably he has gone back to the town to get assistance, and I must be moving. I've a few minutes, however, and you can help me. I was on my way to headquarters. I have just heard that the Germans are bringing up some heavy siege guns to demolish the forts. They are coming by road: were last heard of at Crefeld--huge things, drawn by innumerable traction engines from the estimable millionaire's works at Essen. Will you carry the news to headquarters for me? You will save time--and probably my skin."

"Certainly," said Pariset at once. "This explains the cessation of the bombardment."

"No doubt. They did not expect that poor little Belgium would turn into a Jack-the-Giant-Killer, or they would have brought up these monsters of theirs before. They represent the last word in Culture--according to the gospel of Krupp. I will leave you, then."

"Ware spies!" said Kenneth, as they shook hands.

"We set a thief to catch a thief, don't we?" said Granger with a smile.

He put on his hat and was gone.

"We had better get away at once," said Pariset, biting the end off a Dutch cigar. "But I don't care about reporting by hearsay. What do you say to taking a look at them?"

"At what?"

"At these new apostles of culture."

"The big guns!--why not?"

"We shall have to cross into German territory--a risky game. If caught we shall be instantly shot."

"We've risked a good deal already without damage. Let us try it. I know the country; I've often cycled from Cologne to Crefeld."

"That's to the good. Very well, then; I'll get leave to go first thing in the morning. We'll use the Taube and wear German uniforms. And in case any one comes hunting for Granger, let us pay our bill and go."

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At six o'clock next morning the inhabitants of an old farmhouse at Erkelenz, not

far from the Dutch frontier, were seated at breakfast. There was an old man of some sixty years, his wife and daughter, boys and girls, and two women servants. The farmer himself and his male hands were all on service.

"I wonder where Daddy is now?" said one of the boys.

"And Fritz and Hans?" said a girl.

"Somewhere on the way to Paris, little ones," said the grandfather. "He will bring you back some fine playthings. Granny is wearing the brooch I brought from Paris forty years ago."

"Mother says Daddy may be killed," piped another boy.

"Nonsense!" said the old man. "Was I killed? Not even wounded. Why should your father be?"

"How long will he be away?" asked another.

"Not long. How long was I away in '70, Granny?"

"Six months," said the old woman. "Du lieber Himmel! but it seemed like six years. Wilhelm was in long clothes when you went, and when you came back he was running about. Ah! may God bring him back safe and sound!"

"Listen! What is that?" cried the children's mother.

A humming sound, like the buzzing of a monster bee, floated in through the open window. The children ran to the door.

"An aeroplane! An aeroplane!" they shouted. "See! it is coming down in the meadow."

The household flocked to the door and window.

"A Taube!" said the old man. "Run and see what the airmen want, Karl."

A boy of twelve ran across the farmyard into the meadow. The monoplane had alighted, and a tall man in the uniform of a German captain was hastening towards the house.

"Have you any petrol, boy?" asked the airman.

The country boy looked up with awe, and said nothing. The sight of a German officer afflicted him with shyness. He ran back to his grandfather.

"The Herr Captain needs petrol," he said.

"That is unlucky, Herr Captain," said the old man, saluting the officer. "We have no petrol; I doubt whether you will get any in Erkelenz; it has all been bought for the army."

"Well, give me something to eat and drink."

Kenneth tried, without great success, to adopt the German officer's peremptory manner.

"No, I won't come in," he added. "Bring it to me here; I've no time to spare."

The women hastened to bring him of their best.

"And the Herr Captain's companion--shall we take something to him?" one of them asked.

"He cannot eat or drink with his face bandaged like that," said Kenneth, glancing back at the aeroplane.

Pariset, who could not speak German, had swathed his jaw in a linen bandage.

"Ach, lieber Gott! he is wounded," said the old man.

"We have had an exciting trip," replied Kenneth laconically. "I suppose I shall have to go on to Crefeld. Is anything happening here? I notice that transport is being diverted from the main road to a by-way. Why is that?"

"An accident, Herr Captain," said the man. "A traction engine, drawing a very heavy load, slipped over the edge of the causeway three miles yonder. Something broke; it was late last night, and I heard they had to send to Crefeld for a steam crane to lift it. Maybe it is done by now."

"It was drawing an ammunition wagon, I suppose?"

"It did not look like that, Herr Captain. I walked over to see. But I could not guess what it was, for it was covered all over with tarpaulin."

"Lend me a horse; I'll ride over. Perhaps there's some petrol in the baggage train."

"I am sorry, Herr Captain; all the horses are taken."

"I must walk then. This boy can come and show me the way, and carry back the petrol."

"Surely, mein Herr."

"Keep a look-out, will you? If you see any one approaching, warn the Herr Lieutenant. There may be spies about."

He set off behind the boy. The causeway, he remembered, ran beside the little river Roer, that fell into the Meuse farther west at Roermond. He needed no guide, and indeed did not intend to go right up to the scene of the breakdown; but the boy was useful as a cloak to his real design.

Half an hour's walk across the fields brought him to a hayrick something less than a mile from the spot.

"I ought to be able to get a view from the top of that," he thought.

Bidding the boy wait below, he climbed a ladder set against the side of the rick, raised his field-glasses to his eyes, and adjusted the focus. Meanwhile two old farm labourers had slouched across the field and asked a question of the boy, which he answered in a word.

Kenneth had reason to congratulate himself on having gone no farther. Between him and the causeway a half-troop of cavalry had off saddled, and were smoking near the broken traction engine, which had apparently swerved over the edge, and completely blocked the road. Behind it were two huge lorries, carrying between them a large mass of indefinite shape covered with tarpaulin. At the further end of the causeway was another traction engine with a similar load. Besides

the spick and span cavalry there were a number of men in dirty clothes, some of whom appeared to be engaged in tinkering at the engine.

"Those are the heavy guns, without a doubt," thought Kenneth. "I wish I could have a good look at them, but I'm afraid it's too risky. I might have guessed there would be a cavalry escort."

Obviously it was dangerous to attempt to carry off his imposture with the German officers. It would have been another matter if only the motor men had been concerned. He was disappointed.

As he continued to gaze, however, an idea flashed into his mind. It was pretty clear that the road would remain blocked until some contrivance had been rigged up for lifting the engine. Would Pariset venture a bold stroke? It would be a feather in his cap if he could destroy one, perhaps two, of these monster siege guns.

Shutting up his glasses, he climbed down the ladder, ignored the labourers and their humble salute, and began to hurry back in the direction of the farm. Surprised, the boy stood watching him for a few moments. Then he ran after him, and, plucking up courage, said--

"Will not the Herr Captain go on and get the petrol?"

"I will come in the aeroplane, boy; we have enough to bring us here."

The boy, rather crestfallen, had to trot to keep pace with Kenneth's long strides. He had hoped to receive a few pfennigs for carrying the petrol. Kenneth, busy with his thoughts, forgot the youngster until he was paying the civil farm people for his food. Then, catching sight of the boy's woebegone face, he handed him a silver coin that drove the clouds away. It was lucky, he reflected, that he still had some German money in his possession. A Belgian coin would have given him away.

After five minutes' talk with Pariset, out of earshot of the people, who had gathered about at a little distance, they once more took the air. They had managed to compress a good deal into that brief conversation. Pariset had accepted Kenneth's suggestion with delight. The problem, they agreed, was twofold: they had first to deal with the escort, then with the guns--if they were guns. When they soared away over the meadow they had formed a clear idea of the means by which they would attempt to solve it.

Making a wide sweep, east, north, and west, they approached the causeway south of the spot where the breakdown had occurred. The sight of a Taube monoplane flying obliquely over the road aroused curiosity but no suspicion in the minds of the Germans. But suddenly one of them gave a shout. Next moment a small bomb fell close beside one of the lorries, throwing up a shower of dust and stones. The engineers scuttled away; the troopers rushed to their horses, which, startled by the noise of the explosion, were threatening to stampede.

Pariset banked the aeroplane steeply and wheeled round. As it passed again over the causeway, Kenneth dropped another bomb, which fell close to the first. The men on foot were rushing wildly up the road; on the open fields there was no cover. Most of the troopers had mounted; some had seized their rifles and were firing. But the sight of the aeroplane wheeling again struck them with panic, and with a shout they dashed after their comrades, galloping across the fields.

The aeroplane followed up the fugitives. Owing to its speed, Pariset had to steer a zigzag course in order not to overtake them. Each time it wheeled he contrived to bring it close behind the rearmost horseman, like a sheep dog driving a flock, and Kenneth dropped a bomb to hurry the pace.

They kept up the chase for some minutes; then, there being no sign of rallying, they darted back to the causeway, where the traction engines and lorries now stood deserted. The level field on one side afforded a good alighting place. They came to the ground, sprang from their seats, and as they ran to the causeway noticed one or two men lying wounded.

"We simply haven't time to attend to them," panted Pariset. "The fellows will be riding back in a minute."

They reached the unwieldy vehicles. The impressions of the moment came back to them afterwards--the huge wheels with their grooved rims, the deep ruts they had carved in the road. There were plenty of tools lying about. Kenneth cut the lashings of one of the tarpaulin covers, stripped off the cover, and found, as he had expected, that beneath it lay a portion of a huge weapon, half gun, half mortar, with a bore seventeen inches in diameter.

"It's not the breech block; try the next lorry," urged Pariset.

"I'll deal with this; you go on to the next," said Kenneth.

Each had carried from the aeroplane a cylindrical parcel wrapped in cotton wool. From the end of this a short length of wire protruded. Climbing into the lorries they pushed these parcels into the breech end of the bore of the guns. Then each began to connect the wires with a small battery furnished with a clock-work timing mechanism.

While still engaged in this operation, they heard the clatter of hoofs, and looking up, saw a squadron of cavalry galloping down the road little more than half a mile away.

"How long?" shouted Kenneth.

"Sixty seconds," Pariset replied. "Say when you are ready."

Pariset, the more experienced of the two, was ready first.

"Quick!" he cried, running towards the aeroplane.

"Right!" shouted Kenneth, scrambling down and sprinting after him.

By the time he had vaulted into his seat the engine had been started. Pariset jumped in, threw the engine into gear, and the machine started forward. At the

same moment bullets began to fly around. Pariset paid no heed to them. He had less than half a minute to get beyond the range of explosion.

The machine had barely risen from the ground when there was a deafening report, that seemed to be immediately beneath him. A few moments later there was a second crashing roar. The aeroplane was tossed about like a feather in a gale. It dipped, and for an instant Pariset feared that it would dash to the earth. During the few seconds this miniature tornado continued the airmen's hearts were in their mouths. Involuntarily they bent low to avoid the bullets which the horsemen, now come to a halt, were volleying at them. Keeping a firm grip of the controls, Pariset flew straight onward, rising as rapidly as possible.

Not until he had gained an altitude which seemed to promise immunity from rifle fire did either of them think of turning to see the effect of the explosions. Then Pariset wheeled round, and flew back, Kenneth examining the causeway far below through his field-glasses.

The lorries, as complete vehicles, had disappeared. The remains of one gun lay scattered on the field; those of the other were indistinguishably mixed up with earth, stones, and the debris of the lorries on the causeway.

The leading files of the troopers appeared to have come within a hundred yards of the scene at the moment of the first explosion. A few lay on the ground; some were galloping on their affrighted steeds over the field; only the rear ranks had been able to rein up, and fire their ineffectual shots at the aeroplane hopelessly beyond range.

CHAPTER XIV--HUNTED

It occurred to Pariset that, so perfect was the German organisation, the army besieging Liége might be informed within a few minutes of this audacious raid upon one of their transport trains. He therefore swept round in a wide circle southward, in order to approach the city from the south-west.

Both he and Kenneth were deeply impressed with the enormous westward movement of troops and transport which they saw in their flight. The country beneath them seemed to be alive, like an anthill; with this difference, however, that although there were cross currents the general movement was all in one direction.

Such might have been, in days long past, the migrations of the Huns or of the Kalmuck Tartars.

Over the Meuse, which wound like a silver streak four thousand feet beneath them, there appeared to be a number of pontoon bridges. Every road was a continuous stream of moving objects. Far away to the right they heard at times, above the whirr and hum of the engine, the dull boom of heavy guns; and now and then patches of white and yellow appeared in the air as from nowhere, spread into fantastic shapes, and finally thinned away.

They had just passed over the little town of Verviers, and were bearing away to the west-south-west, so as to pass round Forts Embourg and Boncelles, when the engine suddenly stopped. It had behaved well in their previous excursions, and had been thoroughly overhauled before they started. There was only one thing to be done: to make a vol plane and land as best they could. The aeroplane was very high, and there was plenty of room, but little choice of a landing place. Pariset worked the controls for a long spiral descent, and came down in a field between a wood and a highroad, which he believed to be the main road between Liége and Luxemburg.

There was no traffic at this spot, and they at once began to examine the engine.

"The plugs are choked," said Pariset after a few moments. "Luckily it's only a five minutes' job."

"Hadn't we better wheel the machine round the corner of the wood?" suggested Kenneth. "We don't know but that some Germans may come up at any moment."

"Come along then," said Pariset.

But they had hardly moved the machine three yards when they heard the clatter of hoofs, and a patrol of Uhlans came dashing round a bend in the road. Neither hedge nor dyke bordered the field, and the Uhlans rode straight across it towards the aeroplane.

"We are in for it!" said Pariset, hastily adjusting his bandage. "For goodness' sake try to bluff it out."

Kenneth went hot and cold; his brain seemed paralysed; and when the Uhlans reined up a few yards away he had cudgelled his wits in vain for something to say. A lead was given him by the lieutenant in command.

"Do you want any help, Herr Captain?" he said. "I saw you come down suddenly, and guessed there was something wrong."

"Thanks; it is a mere trifle," replied Kenneth somewhat breathlessly. "Two of the sparking plugs need cleaning. In five minutes we shall be up again."

He bent down to assist Pariset, who had turned his back and was unscrewing the plugs.

"Have you been hit?" asked the lieutenant, noticing the bandage.

"No, luckily; he ought to have gone to the dentist long ago, but couldn't bear the idea of losing a moment at a time like this. A swollen jaw is very painful; you can't eat with any comfort. The only thing to do is to bandage it tightly. But he'll have to go to the dentist."

"You're not attached to the 4th army corps, are you? I haven't noticed you among our airmen."

"We are on special service," said Kenneth, feeling that matters were getting warm in spite of the officer's apparent freedom from suspicion. "You'll excuse me, won't you? we are anxious to get to Liége."

"Certainly."

He watched the two men at their work, remarking that it was a very dirty job.

Meanwhile one of the troopers had been edging his horse close to the aeroplane. Pariset, out of the corner of his eye, noticed him looking at it critically. He bent down to examine one of the planes, gave a grunt of satisfaction, and glanced at his officer, as if wondering whether he might venture to address him directly. Concluding that this might be a breach of discipline, he backed gently towards the Wachtmeister--the sergeant-major through whom he might communicate with the lieutenant without being snubbed.

This by-play escaped the notice of Kenneth, who was half-turned towards the lieutenant. That officer, having satisfied his curiosity about the nature of sparking plugs, bade him good-bye, saluted, and gave the order to ride on. The patrol moved away before the trooper had finished his communication to the Wachtmeister.

As soon as they were out of earshot, Pariset whispered:

"One of those fellows suspects something. If they ride back before we have got these plugs in place we must bolt into the wood."

While speaking he kept his eye on the Uhlans without rising from his stooping posture. They were only a hundred yards away when the Wachtmeister rode alongside the lieutenant and spoke to him. The officer gave the order to halt, reined up, and wheeled his horse.

"Get your revolver ready," whispered Pariset.

He reached for one of the smallest bombs, and fitting a short fuse prepared to light it from the petrol lamp.

The lieutenant was not yet riding back. He had taken out a pocket-book, and was consulting one of its pages. Pretending to be still busy with the engine, the airmen watched him anxiously. The Wachtmeister called up the trooper, who, sitting his horse stiffly, saluted, and spoke in answer to a question from the lieutenant.

"He's got a description of the aeroplane," whispered Kenneth.

"Yes--probably circulated to every patrol," said Pariset. "Run for dear life if he comes this way."

As he spoke the lieutenant shut up his pocket-book, and began to canter back.

"Now!" said Pariset, lighting the fuse, and laying the bomb swiftly but gently behind the engine. Then, taking care to keep the aeroplane between them and the Uhlans, the two dashed towards the wood, about a hundred and twenty yards away.

The majority of the patrol, having received no order, had not turned their horses, nor even ventured to glance round. Only the lieutenant, the Wachtmeister, and the suspicious trooper had seen the flight of the airmen during the first few seconds. But now the lieutenant shouted an order, the men wheeled round, and galloped after their officer, who dug his spurs into his horse and dashed after the fugitives, followed closely by his two troopers.

He had plucked out his revolver, but the aeroplane stood between him and the airmen, running like sprinters towards the wood. Swerving to the left to get a clear field of fire, the lieutenant discharged all its chambers one after another on the chance of a lucky shot. But the fugitives, having made the most of their start, were out of range. They gained the outer fringe of trees and plunged in, the lieutenant being then about thirty yards behind them. He had drawn his sword. His men were strung out at short intervals in his rear.

There was not much cover at the edge of the wood, and the airmen dashed on towards the spot where the trees grew more densely, Pariset leading by a few yards. By the time he reached it, Kenneth heard the lieutenant's horse pounding the turf almost at his heels. It seemed that in a second or two he must be ridden down. With instant decision he dived to the right behind a large tree. The lieutenant, unable to check his horse in time, galloped past, shouting to his men to catch the spy. Kenneth took a flying shot at him, missed, and rushed after Pariset, who at the sound of the shot turned and fired at the Wachtmeister, now only a few yards behind his leader. There was a howl. Neither of the airmen stayed to see the effect of the shot. They plunged into the brushwood, which grew more and more densely as they proceeded, and was more closely set with trees.

"They can't ride through this," Kenneth panted as he overtook Pariset. "They would be swept from their saddles."

"Yes; we're as good as they on foot; we are safe for a while. Did you hear the bomb?"

"Rather: it went off all right; the Taube must be blown to atoms."

The pursuing horsemen, on finding themselves checked by the undergrowth and the trees, flung themselves from their saddles. They lost a few minutes in

tethering their horses, so that when they pushed on on foot, the fugitives had been enabled to penetrate deeper into the wood.

"I hope they'll give it up soon," said Pariset, hearing the troopers' movements in the rustling and crackling undergrowth. "To rout us out they must beat the wood thoroughly."

"It's lucky they're only a patrol and not a whole squadron, or they might encircle the wood," responded Kenneth in the same low tone.

They went still farther among the trees, moving as quietly as they could. It was soon evident that they were being followed up. Every now and then they heard the same sounds of movement, and shouts in different directions behind them. Apparently the Uhlans were scattering to beat the wood systematically.

"Our uniforms account for their perseverance," Pariset remarked. "The Germans don't scruple to wear Belgian uniform, or to dress as civilians; nothing makes them more angry than that we should do the same."

"And they know it was their own Taube, purloined at Cologne," said Kenneth. "You may be sure they are particularly incensed at that."

"We are outstripping them," said Pariset a few moments later. "The sounds are fainter."

"The question is, what shall we find at the other side of the wood? If open fields, we shan't stand a dog's chance against their rifles. Perhaps we had better dodge about among the trees."

"With the risk of tumbling up against one! No, we had better go straight on."

Again they pressed forward in silence. The sounds behind them grew still fainter, but they became aware in a few minutes that the number of their pursuers had increased. There were more voices, distributed over a wider area.

"The regiment has come up, I fancy," said Kenneth. "Very likely some of them will ride round the wood. We're in a tight corner, Remi."

"Hurry on, man. Our one chance is to be first out."

From the continual diminution of the sounds it was plain that the Uhlans were moving with great caution. No doubt they feared an enemy in every bush. The fugitives, on the other hand, pressed on as fast as they could, guarding against a circular course by means of the small compass which Pariset wore in a strap on his wrist.

After a quarter of an hour's hot exertion they came suddenly to the farther edge of the wood. The country immediately in front was open and level, dotted about with single trees and small clumps. In the distance they saw a farmhouse, and still farther away, a picturesque chateau on the side of a hill.

"Shall we make a run for it?" said Kenneth, as they paused a moment before leaving the shelter of the trees.

For answer, Pariset caught him by the sleeve, and drew him back.

"Cut off?" asked Kenneth.

"Yes; a troop of Uhlans are galloping along the edge of the wood away there to the left; nearly a mile away, thank goodness!"

"Fairly trapped!" said Kenneth, with nervous twitching of his eyebrow.

In the excitement of the last half hour their thoughts had been too busy to give them time for apprehension. But now, with Uhlans on foot spread out in the wood behind them, a troop on horseback approaching on their left, possibly another on their right, they began to realise what it was like to be hunted. They felt as if inexorable walls were closing upon them to crush them. It would be madness to take to the open. The impulse to turn to the right in the wood, away from the galloping Uhlans, was dulled by the fear that a second troop had been sent to head them off in that direction. They adopted the wisest course in such a situation: remained where they were, some few yards from the outer fringe of trees, and tried to think out their problem calmly.

"It will be safer to let them pass us," said Pariset presently. "They will expect to see us emerge; let us go to meet them. Can you hear the fellows behind us in the wood?"

They stood listening.

"No," said Kenneth. "I daresay they are stealing up quietly."

"We must keep our ears open. Now, as quickly as possible."

They threaded their way cautiously through the wood towards the oncoming Uhlans. Very soon they heard the thuds of the horses' hoofs to their right. Among the trees they could neither see nor be seen. The sound ceased suddenly. Then came the muffled murmur of voices. Apparently the Uhlans had drawn rein almost at the spot where the fugitives had intended to break cover.

"A clever lot!" whispered Pariset. "They calculated to a yard or two where we should be likely to come out. A good thing we turned this way."

The Uhlans, in fact, only about two hundred yards away, had dismounted, and leaving their horses tethered in the charge of two of their number, had entered the wood, spread out, and begun to beat the coverts in the direction of their comrades advancing from the farther side.

The fugitives pressed on rapidly, parallel with the edge of the wood, hoping that they would not meet the men at the extremity of the far-extended line. There was no sound to guide them or give warning. Presently they ventured to draw a little nearer to the edge, where the trees were sparser and they could move more quickly. Pariset constantly consulted his compass. Their course was northward, in the direction of Liége.

For twenty minutes or more they jogged on, careful not to lose their wind. Then they discovered that the wood was narrowing, and a few more minutes

brought them within sight of its end, the apex of a triangle. Peering out cautiously through the trees, they saw a little way ahead the fork of two roads. That to the left was evidently the main road near which the aeroplane had landed. That to the right must be the byroad along which the Uhlans had ridden to cut them off. Beyond, on either side, were open fields.

They halted in perplexity, anxious though they were to lose no time. A false move, an unfortunate decision, and they were lost.

"If we dash across country we may be seen," said Pariset. "If we take to the road we may meet more troops. But we can't stay in the wood. The Uhlans will beat it thoroughly."

"Could we climb a tree and hide in the foliage?" suggested Kenneth.

"We mightn't be as lucky as your Merry Monarch," said Pariset. "The fellows are capable of burning down the whole wood if they can't find us. And in a very short time they are sure to draw a cordon round it. We must get out, somehow or other. If only the roads were hedged, like your English country roads, we should stand a chance."

They were still discussing their quandary when they heard the rumble of an approaching cart. Looking eagerly ahead, they saw a large wagon piled with loose hay. The driver appeared to be a Belgian peasant. Beside him sat an armed soldier in the bluish grey German uniform. They seemed only half awake. The two horses were plodding slowly, with drooping heads. The appearance of men and beasts suggested that they had been travelling all night.

There was a gleam in Kenneth's eyes as he turned to Pariset.

"Into the hay?" he whispered.

"The wagon will pass the Uhlans," Pariset replied.

"So much the better."

"But the hay may be for their horses."

"Not very likely. It must have been definitely requisitioned, and they wouldn't dare to touch it."

Pariset pondered. A faint sound came from the depths of the wood.

"It's our only chance," he said, "but in ten minutes we may have lances or bullets through us. A la bonne heure!"

CHAPTER XV--HUNS AT PLAY

The wagon rumbled heavily along the road. The two men stood just within the wood, watching the driver and the soldier, looking up and down the road with a half-formed fear that more troops would come in sight. They allowed the wagon to pass them; then, running behind it on tiptoe, they leapt up, and plunged into the hay, which was loosely piled, just as it had been pitched down from a looted rick.

They burrowed their way through the scented mass, drawing it closely behind them to cover their tracks. The creaking of the cart wheels, the loud tramp of the big Flemish horses, the sleepiness of the men in front were all in their favour. They reached the forepart of the wagon without having attracted attention. Kenneth's nostrils itched. It was lucky, he thought, that the hay was dry and the season far advanced, or a fit of sneezing would have betrayed him.

To get air, and to enable them to see down the road, they made little gaps in the hay, scarcely broader than two fingers. Then they lay still, happy in their escape from the Uhlans, but desperately anxious about what might come.

The wagon was travelling towards Luxemburg. Presently, muffled by the hay, the sound of men's voices reached their ears. These continued for some minutes; no doubt they proceeded from the Uhlans in the wood. After about twenty minutes they heard a louder voice, close at hand. The wagon stopped.

"Have you seen two officers?" asked a man in German. "Dressed as Germans. One a lean ugly fellow, the other a round moon-faced baby. They are spies."

The soldier, pulling himself together, answered briskly "No!" Conscious of having been dozing on duty he went further.

"We have seen nobody for the last three miles," he said. "The whole country is deserted. What is doing about here?"

"The spies came down in that aeroplane yonder, and escaped into the wood."

"Teufel! I see no aeroplane."

"It is in ruins; the fellows blew it up. It was one of ours, too, a Taube. They stole it."

"There will be fine shooting when they are caught. These Belgians are the very deuce. Half my regiment are down. My horse was shot. I'm going to take one of these cart horses when we get to Spa. They are rather heavy, but one must take what one can get. Horses are scarce."

The Uhlan who had spoken came round to the back of the wagon, and pulled out an armful of hay for his horse. The fugitives shivered. If others of the troop did the same thing, their screen would be removed, detection was inevitable.

"Not too much," called the trooper in front, standing up and peering round the corner of the load. "Don't get me into trouble. I was ordered to bring back a full load, and the Herr Major is a terrible man in his anger."

"Where did you get it from?" asked the Uhlan, now joined by several of his comrades who had been left in charge of the horses of those searching the wood.

"From a farm about two hours' journey back, somewhere about Theux, I think they call it. It's an out-of-the-way place, but we got the tip from a Hussar who lodged with the farmer for a year or two; there wasn't much he didn't find out; and he knew exactly how much fodder he had."

"Did you leave any?"

"Two good ricks. Are you short?"

"Yes, our supplies haven't come up. Plenty of beer on the farm?"

"Not so much as there was," replied the man with a laugh. "But enough to get properly drunk on if they give you time."

"That's the place for us. How do you get there?"

"Up the road about five miles, turn down a by-road on the right; there's a row of poplars on one side; you can't miss it. We must move on. I hope you'll catch the spies. Good luck!"

The wagon jogged on.

"Whip up your horses," cried the soldier to the driver. "We have been too long on the road."

The fugitives, on tenterhooks all this time, breathed more freely when they had passed the spot where the Uhlans were grouped on the grass, guarding the horses and the ruins of the aeroplane. But they realised that they were escaping one danger only to fall into another. The destination of the wagon was Spa, no doubt filled with Germans. They must leave the wagon before it reached that town.

They were thinking of slipping out at a quiet stretch of the road, and taking their chance of bolting across the fields, when the wagon was met by another Uhlan patrol, who after questioning the trooper, wheeled their horses and rode

alongside.

"You are just in time, Schmidt," said one of the newcomers.

"What for?" asked the trooper, who evidently belonged to the same regiment.

"To see how we reduce the population. There's a big farm in a hamlet a quarter-mile up the road. Rumpelmeyer was shot near there, so we routed out all the men in the place except the farmer, who escaped. As soon as he is rounded up we are going to shoot the lot."

They rumbled on into the hamlet, and pulled up at the gate of the farm. The terrified villagers were penned up like cattle in the farmyard, guarded by a dozen Uhlans. A few women at the wall, imploring the Germans to have mercy, were answered with brutal jeers.

"A dirty herd!" said the trooper on the wagon. "Why don't you shoot them at once?"

"The Wachtmeister thinks that would be too good for them. First dinner, and then sport, says he. He is a humorist, our Wachtmeister. Here he is."

"Thank goodness I needn't go any further on this lumbering wagon," said the trooper. "Is the whole regiment coming up from Spa?"

"In the course of the day. Fifteen of us came in advance. Two are hunting for the farmer."

"Well done, Schmidt," said the sergeant, coming up to the wagon. "You've a good load there."

"Shall I unload, and give the horses a feed?" asked the trooper.

"They can wait. There's a hot dinner ready, prepared by our kind friends the Belgians. They entertain us; afterwards we shall entertain them. Poor Rumpelmeyer has gone. But a dozen Belgians are waiting yonder to join him. A dozen Belgians are not worth one good German, but it's something to go on with. We shall find others; it would be a pity to leave too many to bother us when the country is ours."

Kenneth, under the hay, was squirming. Pariset, knowing no German, was not aware of what was coming, but his apprehension was all the greater for his ignorance. Kenneth whispered that the wagon was not to be unloaded yet; he dared not say more at the moment, with so many enemies within hearing.

The sky was becoming overclouded. The wagoner took the horses out, and led them to loose boxes in the stables. The trooper Schmidt had sprung down and entered the house, where all the Uhlans except three left on guard over the prisoners had assembled for the good dinner prepared by the women of the farm under the eye of their truculent visitors.

The wagon having been left standing at the gate, Kenneth ventured to repeat to Pariset the gist of the conversation he had heard. The Belgian swore under his

breath.

"We must get out while they are at dinner," Kenneth whispered.

"Those three brutes would see us," said Pariset, eyeing the three Uhlans savagely through his peephole.

"I'm afraid they would," Kenneth agreed. "But we are bound to be discovered when they unload."

"Well, we'll get away if we see half a chance. We must wait. I wish we could do something for those poor wretches in the yard. These Germans have much to answer for, Ken; and they shall pay--they shall pay!"

They lay in their stuffy shelter, listening to the sounds of merriment--heavy-hoofed merriment--from within the house, the grumbles of the Uhlans who had been left outside and were losing the fun, the sobs of the women at the wall. The sky grew blacker and blacker, rain began to fall. The Uhlans on guard turned up their collars and swore.

Presently there was a diversion. The two Uhlans who had been out rounding up the missing farmer had caught him and a second man, and were bringing them along at a trot, prodding them with their lances to make them keep up with the horses. There were cries of dismay from the herded prisoners, and of pity from the women. The attention of the Uhlans on guard was somewhat diverted from the prisoners to the newcomers, as these were marched through the gate and across the farmyard to the hurdles within which their fellow villagers were confined.

"Now's the time!" whispered Kenneth. "Creep behind the cart and round by the stables. There's just a chance."

They slid out of the wagon, slipped into the yard, and ran to the stables, being screened from the guards' observation by the horses of the Uhlans who had just returned. Behind the stables there was a barn, with a ladder reaching to its high loft.

"Up there!" whispered Pariset. "We should be seen if we ran across the fields."

They clambered up, and panting with excitement and haste threw themselves on the floor of the loft.

"Perhaps we can remain here until night," said Pariset. "The place is empty; they've no reason for visiting it again."

They heard the newly-arrived troopers lead their horses to the stables and address some one there in loud peremptory tones. Then their spurred boots were heard clanking over the cobbles, and they went into the house. Shouts of applause followed their entrance; no doubt they had reported their capture.

"I wish we could do something!" murmured Pariset restlessly. "But we can't tackle twelve or fifteen."

A few minutes later, when the tremors of excitement had ceased, Kenneth

got up.

"We can at least go and see who is in the stables," he said. "Perhaps we could make off with a couple of horses."

"Anything rather than lie here idle," said Pariset.

They crept down the ladder, and stole round the outbuilding towards where they knew by the sounds the door of the stable was. It was on the side remote from the corner where the prisoners were herded. Peeping in at the door, Kenneth saw the driver of the wagon sitting disconsolately on an upturned pail, and beckoned to Pariset to precede him. They slipped into the stable. The wagoner jumped up with a start when he saw two Germans, as he supposed.

"Hist! I am a Belgian," whispered Pariset hurriedly in Flemish. "My friend is an Englishman."

The man looked at them narrowly, only half believing.

"It is true," said Pariset. "We want to save the prisoners. Do you know the place? Will you help?"

Convinced by their appearance and by Pariset's Flemish the man said:

"My word! will I help! One of them is my brother; two are my cousins. Only tell me what I can do, mijnheer. But not here; it is not safe; come to the back."

"Wait!" said Pariset, pointing to a door at the further end of the stable. "Where does that lead to?"

"Into the harness room."

"And beyond that?"

"The kitchen."

"Who are in the kitchen?"

"I do not know; maybe the mistress and the women servants. They cook the meals for those hogs."

"Is the door unlocked?"

"Most likely; it is never locked during the day."

"Then creep into the kitchen and tell the women we are here. Quickly! We will hide in the harness room. And find out where the Germans have stacked their rifles, and how many there are."

The man passed through the door, followed by Pariset and Kenneth, who remained among the harness while the wagoner went on to the kitchen.

"It's a frightful risk, Remi," whispered Kenneth.

Pariset set his teeth.

"I'm a Belgian," he said. "It's not your job. Go back to----"

"Rubbish!" Kenneth interrupted. "We sink or swim together.... Here he comes!"

"I saw the mistress," said the man. "They have caught the master; she is

frantic. There are ten Uhlans in the big room; the sergeant is alone in the parlour beyond. The maids are serving them."

"The rifles?" said Pariset.

"They are not stacked, mijnheer. There is no room between the wall and the big table. They are laid anyhow in the corner near the kitchen door."

For a minute or two Pariset and Kenneth conversed in rapid whispers. While they were speaking the farmer's wife, a large capable Flamande, came to the door, an expression of mingled agitation and hope on her broad red face.

"We try it?" said Pariset to Kenneth.

"Yes."

The three men entered the kitchen.

"If you can save my husband and my son--" began the good woman imploringly.

Pariset cut her short. She had the appearance of abundant energy.

"We want your help, meffrouw," he said. "Courage! Can you smuggle some of the rifles out of the room? Not all."

"I will try, mijnheer," she said quietly, with the firm look of the Flemish housewife.

There was much noise from the room beyond. The troopers were eating and drinking hard. Pariset and Kenneth stepped behind a large Dutch clock when the women pushed open the door, carrying a dish of steaming stew. They saw her recoil a little when the Germans hailed her appearance with boisterous shouts. She beckoned to her two maids, stout Flamandes like herself, then disappeared towards the right.

The two airmen waited anxiously. Would the housewife's nerve fail? Would the Germans detect her? They had fallen gluttonously on the new dish, praising Belgian viands after the short commons of the days preceding.

Presently the woman reappeared at the door. Her face was pale; she was grimly pressing her lips together, and when she had entered the kitchen and closed the door she took from the folds of her gown a rifle.

"The maids stood in front of me," she murmured.

"Take the rifle into the harness room," said Pariset to the wagoner. "Another, meffrouw."

The poor woman trembled, but summoning her courage she passed again into the room. The door at the further end was now open, and the sergeant stood in it. He had consulted his dignity by dining alone in the parlour.

"More wine!" he shouted. "It's poor stuff, mother, but I must make the best of it till we get to Champagne. Then we'll break a few necks--of bottles and Frenchmen."

Roars of laughter from the men greeted this sally. One of the maids carried

a fresh bottle into the parlour. Meanwhile the housewife had taken advantage of the diversion caused by the sergeant's pleasantry to remove another rifle. Three more she brought out at intervals; then Pariset said it was enough; to abstract more might lead the men to notice the diminution of the pile. Pariset examined each of the five; there were cartridges in all.

"Do your maids know German?" he asked the woman.

"Katrinka knows a little," she replied.

"Ask her to take some wine to the men on guard outside--it is by the sergeant's orders. You and the other maid each take a bottle too. Supply the Uhlans in there with plenty of food first, to keep them occupied. They will gorge themselves so long as you please."

While the women carried into the room dishes loaded with cakes and patties, Pariset and the two others held a whispered conversation in the harness room. On the return of the women, Pariset asked the mistress to give the carrier a bottle of wine. The man took it in his left hand; his right held a knife.

The inner door of the kitchen was closed. They moved quietly to a side door opening directly on the farmyard. Rain and mist threw a murky gloom over the scene. The women, carrying bottles, moved quickly towards the discontented Uhlans, who uttered guttural exclamations of pleasure when the girl Katrinka gave the message with which Pariset had primed her. Behind them slouched the wagoner, lifting his bottle to his lips with ostentatious enjoyment. Within the shadow of the door Pariset and Kenneth stood with levelled rifles, their eyes fixed on the scene in front, their ears alert for sounds in the rear.

The women had given the Uhlans a bottle each. The good wife had a second in reserve. Turning their backs upon the prisoners, the guard broke the necks of the bottles, and drank with great gulps. Unnoticed, the wagoner slipped round behind them, cut the cords that bound the nearest prisoner, handed him the knife, and edged towards the Uhlans, still taking pulls at his bottle.

Five of the prisoners had been released by their companion before one of the guards, half-turning, noticed a commotion within the pens, and at a second glance saw with amazement what was happening. Dropping his bottle with a furious oath, he seized his rifle, but before it reached his shoulder the wagoner swung his uncorked bottle with all his force and broke it on the Uhlan's head, stretching him on the ground in a crimson pool of wine. He caught the man's rifle as it fell, and bayoneted the second German, who had turned at his comrade's cry. The third, evading a blow aimed at him with her bottle by the sturdy housewife, shouted for help, and was lifting his rifle when it was wrenched from his hands by the villager who had been first released, and he fell beside the others, stunned by a blow from the butt end.

Kenneth and Pariset, who had followed every movement with breathless

anxiety, felt that the party outside would give no trouble for a time, at any rate. They turned sharply round on hearing a commotion from the inner room, where the guzzling Uhlans had heard, through their own noise, the shout from the farmyard. Jumping to their feet, they crowded towards the rifles in the corner, and had just discovered that the weapons would not go round, when the door was thrown open, and they saw standing in the doorway two German officers.

"Achtung!" cried Kenneth, in the short sharp tone he had many a time heard in a German drill yard.

The men sprang to attention, clicked their heels, and saluted. They had no time to think; they acted with mechanical obedience. Standing thus rigid they were amazed to see the officers cover them with their rifles, and to hear a peremptory summons to surrender. Fuddled, astounded, they threw up their hands.

At this moment the door of the parlour was flung open, and the sergeant, red with wine and rage, before he had taken in the scene, demanded what the noise was about. His voice dropped at the end of the sentence, when he saw, as he thought, a captain and a lieutenant before him. A sound of rushing feet behind him caused him to swing round hastily. With a startled cry he raised his revolver, and fired; but he was immediately hurled backward to the floor by a dozen sturdy peasants, the foremost of whom held a knife.

There was a great silence in the farm.

CHAPTER XVI--THE CARETAKER

"We shall have to clear everybody out of this double quick," said Pariset. "If the regiment comes up every soul will be massacred."

"You mean that we must all trek?" said Kenneth.

"Yes. You and I must rig ourselves up as Uhlans, and pretend that we are convoying prisoners. The villagers had better gather what valuables they want to save, and migrate, it doesn't much matter where to, so long as it is as far as possible from the line of the German advance."

He explained his plan to the farmer and the other Belgian peasants. They suggested that a short and easy way of securing safety was to shoot all the Uhlans and bury them, but Pariset would not agree to that. The men having surrendered, their lives at least must be spared.

Without delay preparations were made. The body of the dead sergeant was hastily buried. The Uhlan prisoners were stripped of their uniforms, clad in coarse garments provided by the villagers, and roped together. The wagon was emptied of its hay and loaded up with such little treasures as the villagers possessed, among them an extraordinary number of birdcages. Then it rumbled off, followed by the whole population of the hamlet, men, women, and children, setting off through the rain to some sequestered village off the main route, where they might hope to be left untouched by the German tide.

Pariset and Kenneth exchanged their uniforms for those of two of the Uhlans, provided themselves with civilian clothes, selected two of the best horses, and after a few minutes' puzzled consideration what to do with the rest, removed their trappings and let them loose in the fields.

It was now getting late in the afternoon. Rain was still falling heavily, which was at once an inconvenience and an advantage. For safety's sake Pariset bandaged his head again; then they started, Kenneth riding ahead, the captive Uhlans between him and Pariset.

They were under no illusion as to the danger they were incurring. If they should meet any considerable body of Germans, a word from one of the prisoners would be their undoing. But what with the rain and the approach of darkness they hoped to avoid any such contretemps. The direction of their march was westward, their intention being to approach Liége from the south-west. So far as they knew the Germans had not pushed their way in force farther west than Stoumont, so that they were unlikely to encounter anything more serious than patrols and outposts. Such were formidable enough.

Marching across fields, by by-ways, through woods, they arrived by nightfall in the neighbourhood of the river Ourthe. Some few miles beyond that river they believed that the French army was in line. As they were passing a cluster of cottages a voice in German called upon them to halt. Pariset moved up to the front of the prisoners, and pointing his revolver threatened to shoot if any man spoke a word. Kenneth meanwhile, answering in German, had ridden a few paces ahead, and explained to the sentry who had challenged that he was escorting some Belgian civilians as prisoners to Erézée, and asked in his turn for news. To his surprise and alarm he learnt that the Germans were in force a few miles to the south, and expected next day to force the passage of the Ourthe. At the hamlet at which he had arrived a small infantry outpost had quartered itself that afternoon.

Getting from the sentry the direction of Erézée, he rode back and led the

party away from the hamlet to the south-west.

"That was a near thing, Remi," he said. "We shall never be able to get these fellows to our own lines."

"Pity we didn't let the farmer's men shoot them," returned Pariset. "They'll be our ruin."

"I vote we leave them at the next village we come to. They'll be discovered by the Germans in their advance to-morrow."

"Not a man of them! The villagers would have put them out of sight by to-morrow. We must leave them on the road if you want to keep them alive."

They had still not determined what to do with their troublesome charges when they caught sight of lights twinkling mistily through the rain-laden darkness ahead. Kenneth slipped down from his saddle, and went forward on foot to reconnoitre, the rest halting. In a few minutes he returned.

"The place is evidently full of Germans," he said. "I heard the eternal 'Deutschland über Alles'; the bosches certainly sing well! We must make up our minds once for all what to do."

After a brief discussion they retreated some distance up the road, out of earshot from the village. On one side was an extensive plantation, probably the covert of some Belgian nobleman. Here they decided to leave their prisoners. The trees would give the men a certain protection from the rain. They could make themselves heard when their troops passed along the road in the morning. There accordingly the two young fellows placed the Uhlans, eking out the rope to bind their legs as well as their arms. Then they struck down a bridlepath that ran westward, the direction of the Ourthe.

The night was so dark that though the rain ceased towards midnight they made but slow progress. In changing clothes neither had provided himself with matches, so that Pariset's compass was useless. Groping from bridlepath to lane, from lane to high road, which they quitted as soon as possible, stealing past the few cottages they came upon, they wandered for an hour or two until both felt that they must wait for daylight, if they were to secure themselves against the risk of falling unawares among the enemy. They tethered their horses in a copse, and, being wet through, paced up and down to maintain their circulation until the dawn stole through the trees. Then, weary, hungry, and bedraggled, they remounted, and pursued their way along a narrow sunken road. Ignorant of their whereabouts, they could only trust to chance and the compass, unless they should presently come upon Belgians whom they might ask to direct them.

But the country appeared to be deserted. When they cautiously approached the first wayside cottage they came to, they found no one there. Everything was in order; the Germans had not yet visited it; clearly the inhabitants had fled at the mere rumour of their advance.

About eight o'clock they came in sight of a large country-house, lying back from the road in extensive grounds. The aspect of it, and an armoured motor-car standing at the gates, caused them to draw up within the cover of the trees bordering the road. The gates were broken, there were gaps in the wall, and one side of the house was damaged by shells.

"We had better go back a little, and cut across the fields," said Pariset. "That car is probably German; there may be Germans inside. It would be risky to pass the house."

"Perhaps it's a Belgian car," Kenneth suggested. "I'm inclined to wait until we know. We have hopelessly lost our way."

"Look out!" said Pariset.

Two men in German uniform had descended on the far side of the car, and begun to walk up and down in front of the gates, in the manner of men stretching their legs after long waiting. Pariset and Kenneth drew farther back, behind a clump of trees, dismounted, and watched.

In a few minutes they heard the characteristic clatter of a motor bicycle. From beyond the house a cyclist in uniform dashed up at full speed; he halted at the gates, dismounted, and exchanging a word with the waiting men walked up the drive and entered the house. Soon he reappeared, with a German officer and a civilian. These entered the motor-car with the two men, and drove away in the direction from which the cyclist had come. He remounted and rode after them. An old man had tottered after the Germans; he closed the gates, or what remained of them; then, after watching the vehicles out of sight, he returned to the house, stepping much more briskly than when he came from it.

"He's glad to see the backs of them; a Belgian, without doubt," said Kenneth. "Let us go and ask him the way."

"I'll go; you remain with the horses," said Pariset.

Looking along the road to make sure that no enemy was in sight, Pariset hurried to the gates, walked up the drive, and rang the bell at the front door. It was only after ringing twice that his summons was answered. The door opened; the bent old man, white of hair and beard, rubbed his hands nervously together as he stood on the threshold.

"Good morning!" said Pariset in French. "You don't speak German?"

"Alas, we Belgians are backward in many things," replied the man in French with a provincial accent and in quavering tones. "What can I do for you?"

"First, tell me where I am, where does the road lead to?"

"By Hamoir to Liége."

"Who were the party who left just now?"

"Officers of your own army": he glanced at the Uhlan uniform.

"And the cyclist?"

"A despatch rider, I think." Then, in the same trembling uncertain voice of an old man, he went on in English: "He was a glue merchant in the Minories six months ago--Ernst Lilienthal & Co., 2nd floor: mind the lift! And if I were you, Herr Pariset, I should wear that tureen" (pointing to the Uhlan helmet) "a trifle more upright, and your shoulder strap a little more aslant, when you meet more Germans than you care to tackle single-handed."

At the first words of English Pariset stared; then he smiled; before the seeming old man had concluded Pariset grasped his hand.

"Mr. Granger! Your disguise is complete, wonderful."

"My dear sir!" said Granger deprecatingly. "But come inside. I want news of our friend Amory."

"He is only a few yards away. I'll fetch him; he is in Uhlan uniform, like me. Is it safe?"

"A little more than safe, I hope," said Granger with a smile. "We have some few hours to spare; not too many, perhaps. You have horses?"

"Yes."

"Tether them behind that shrubbery yonder. I don't recommend the stables. Bring Amory straight into the house."

Pariset hastened back to the spot where he had left Kenneth.

"Come along!" he said. "I have discovered a friend."

"That's capital!" said Kenneth. "Is he an old friend?"

"Not exactly an old friend. It is that old man you saw come to the gate. I have only known him a few days--since I met you, in fact."

"That's odd," said Kenneth, puzzled. "We have been together practically every minute since we met, and I wasn't aware you had made a new acquaintance of any old man except that farmer and his friend the miller."

"What is odder is that he asked after you."

"Really! Who is he?"

"Come and see. You'll be glad to meet him."

"Hang your mystifications!"

"Not mine. But there he is at the door. Those fellows, by the way, who went off in the automobile were Germans, but the old man assured me it is quite safe to accept his invitation."

While speaking they had led their horses to the house. They tied them up in a thick shrubbery behind the lawn, and went up the steps to the front door.

"How do you do, Amory?" said Granger in his natural voice, holding out his hand.

"By George!" gasped Kenneth. "A splendid get-up; I shouldn't have known you. What a Proteus you are!"

"Without his prophetic gifts, or I should have expected you. Come in: I have

some interesting news for you."

"But what----"

"What am I?" Granger interposed. "I am an old family servant who, like the domestic cat, stuck to the old place after the family had left. I am caretaker, *pro tem.*--and the time will be very short, I fancy. We will bar the door; I am very vigilant. Now I am at your service."

CHAPTER XVII--A BARMECIDE FEAST

Granger laughed when Kenneth related the incidents of the past twenty-four hours.

"You are uncommonly lucky young daredevils," he said. "To the best of my knowledge Proteus, for all his quick changes, had only one life; you seem to have several apiece. The only pity is that you couldn't enjoy the triumph that would have attended your marching of the prisoners into camp."

"Yes, I should have liked that," said Kenneth. "But what are you doing here? What is your game? Your disguise is perfect, upon my word!"

"I will tell you--in confidence," he replied with a sly look. "From information received I arrived here yesterday afternoon. As you see, the amiable Teutons have left their mark on the house. My informant had led me to expect that it would be visited by certain German gentlemen. Sure enough, late last night an armoured car honked at the door, and when I lifted the bar with my fumbling fingers, there entered an officer and a civilian. A sergeant and three privates remained outside until the major ordered them in to search the house. The civilian was clearly a man of some importance, judging by the deference--somewhat strange among Germans--paid to him by the soldier occupants of the car. He went by the name of Brinckmann, but as an ornament of society in Cologne, and occasionally I believe in London also, he was known as Kurt Hellwig."

"By George!" exclaimed Kenneth.

"I thought I should interest you."

"The cur!"

"Hush, my dear fellow! Hellwig enjoys imperial favour. He boasted of a particularly cordial interview with the War Lord, who appears to take a close personal interest in underground operations. Well, the major and Hellwig dined together--if the scratch meal that my trembling hands prepared for them could be called a dinner. They had to be content with inferior wine: thirsty compatriots of theirs had consumed the best. I waited at table: in our--profession, we play many parts. They were expecting a visit from a high-placed officer this morning; that was the item in my original information that led me to impersonate the aged servitor, sans teeth, sans eyes--you know the quotation. As a Belgian peasant, speaking French only villainously, I could not be expected to understand the language of these lords of the world. They conversed quite freely, and confirmed my informant in every particular. I hoped to hear more this morning, but unluckily Fate has robbed me of the opportunity. A despatch rider came up a little while ago on one of those noisy mechanical monstrosities that have ousted the thoroughbred of former days."

"Oh, come now! The motor cycle is much more useful than the horse," Kenneth interrupted.

"Especially when a tyre bursts, a nut falls off, or the gearing goes wrong! However, it appeared that the appointment was cancelled. The high officer would not come here, but summoned my gentlemen to meet him at Marche, some fifteen miles west."

"They have advanced as far as that, then?" said Pariset ruefully.

"They are on the way to Paris, my dear sir," said Granger. "They have, I understand, given rendezvous there for the 26th of this month. Their confidence is, perhaps, a little ahead of their capacity. But your unexpected arrival--we cannot know everything!--is very welcome. I seem to see that by this happy chance my time may not be wholly wasted. You will make very good Uhlans when I have touched you up a little."

"What do you mean?" asked Kenneth.

"Hellwig said, on leaving, that he and his friends would return about midday. In his pleasant way he threatened to burn the house over my head if I did not prepare a better dejeuner than the dinner he suffered last night. Imagine my agitation! What a calamity! How should I meet my master when he returns? My hands shook so violently that I began to be afraid of overdoing my part! ... But now, gentlemen, for Herr Hellwig's dejeuner. I can count on your assistance. He will need a good digestion!"

"You mean to tackle them?" asked Pariset.

"I don't want to be unfair to either party--to take you at the Germans' valuation, or to rate them too low. Suppose I stand aside; there will then be two against two."

"But there are four others," said Kenneth.

"Who being of inferior clay are not allowed to contaminate the air for their betters. They remain outside. Last night they took turns at sentry-go in the rain in front of the house, and when not on duty dozed in the car."

"They may bring others back with them," suggested Pariset.

"They will not, if I know my Hellwig," answered Granger. "Of course we are wofully outnumbered if they all take a hand, to say nothing of the machine gun. The sound of that would probably bring down upon us a swarm of gentle Germans."

"Are they so near?" asked Kenneth.

"I tottered through a large camp of them a couple of miles to the north, and this morning I saw from the upper windows troops moving along a road within a mile and a half to the west."

"Then we should have tumbled right into the camp if we had gone on," said Kenneth.

"I think better of you than that! But you see that we must keep the machine gun quiet at all costs. A revolver shot would be safe, perhaps; but if we can avoid that, too, so much the better. Now I really must go and make my perquisitions. Last night I cooked some new-killed beef they brought with them; to-day they expect something more choice. I must scour the neighbourhood. There will be plenty of time, I think; if they should return before I do, I must leave you to exercise the same resourcefulness as has defied the superman hitherto. They may search the house as they did last night. As a precaution, I suggest that you take refuge in the garden during my absence. The shrubberies are excellent."

"Can you give us something to eat?" said Kenneth. "We are famished."

"Unhappily they cleared the board this morning, leaving me nothing but the crumbs. But I will be as quick as possible. You shall breakfast royally."

He left them. Instead of adopting his suggestion they went to the top of the house and watched the long defile of German troops on the western road. They would hear or see the returning car in good time to make their escape by the back door.

Within an hour Granger returned, with a couple of fowls, a duck, and other comestibles purchased at high prices from the few peasants in the neighbouring village whom the approach of the Germans had not scared away. Among his many accomplishments was a considerable skill in cooking. He roasted the duck and one of the fowls, prepared bread sauce and apple, boiled potatoes to a nice point of flouriness, turned out Brussels sprouts dry and crisp.

"Now we will make a start," he said. "I can always work better if I am well fed, and you, I am sure, are very sharpset."

"We are indeed," said Kenneth. "But what about the Germans?"

"There will be at least a smell of cooking when they arrive. The pleasures of hope are keener than the pleasures of memory, I believe. While you eat, I will talk. What I say may aid your digestion; but you must exercise your own united judgment. When you have finished, I suggest that you rest until they come; they are not soft-tongued, and if you fall asleep their entrance will waken you. There are excellent divans in the smoking-room on the other side of that curtain."

During the meal Granger outlined the plan which their arrival had suggested. It was audacious enough, but, as he remarked with a smile, they had had some training for important parts. When there was nothing left of the poultry but the bones, they went into the smoking-room and threw themselves on two luxurious divans upholstered in saddle bags. Granger cleared away, and placed clean plates and cutlery on the table.

Fatigued though they were, excitement kept them awake. Soon after one they heard the car approaching. It drew up at the gates, which were closed, and the soldier-chauffeur sounded his horn, while two of his comrades alighted and pushed the gates open. Granger, after glancing into the smoking-room, hastened to the front door, which he opened, once more a frail old servingman, as Hellwig and the major, followed by the sergeant, with two bottles of wine, came up the steps.

"Poultry--or game!" exclaimed Hellwig, sniffing appreciatively as he entered.

"That is well; I am ravenous," said the officer. "At any rate we shall not be poisoned to-day by the old man's vinegar.... Lay those bottles down," he added, addressing the sergeant, "then go out. You and the men shall have what is left from our meal."

The sergeant saluted and went out. Hellwig and the officer drew chairs to the table and seated themselves.

"Make haste!" Hellwig called in French through the open door towards the kitchen. "Stir your stumps, old man."

Granger came shuffling into the room, bent of back, nervously clasping his hands.

"Where is the dejeuner?" cried Hellwig. "Why have you come empty-handed? What do you mean by keeping us waiting?"

"Pardon, monsieur," faltered Granger. "I must beg messieurs to excuse me."

"Excuses! What do you mean, old fool?"

Granger's hands trembled more violently than ever. In his thin quavering voice he stammered:

"Pardon, monsieur; I am an old bird. Just before messieurs returned, parbleu! there came two cavalrymen, Uhlans, it seems, with a hunger of wolves. I explained as well as I could that the dejeuner was being prepared for two noble

officers, but----"

"Well?" cried Hellwig, as the speaker paused.

"Pardon, monsieur; but they--they have eaten it all up."

"Sapperment! Where are those Uhlans?" roared Hellwig, half rising.

"They are here, monsieur. Hola!"

Kenneth and Pariset drew the curtain aside, and stepped into the room. Each held a revolver behind his back.

"What kind of behaviour is this?" growled the major. "Salute, pigs!"

Instead of the expected salute, the Germans saw two steady right hands pointing revolvers at their heads.

"Merely a little joke, major," said Kenneth quietly: "a little play-acting. You and your friend shall be in the cast. You shall pretend to be prisoners."

The major swelled with astonishment and rage. Hellwig, who had fixed his eyes on Kenneth, changed colour, and made a sudden grab for his revolver. But a peremptory voice from behind his chair caused him to sink back and slowly turn his amazed eyes.

"Hands up!"

The old servingman had suddenly become straight. His hands no longer trembled, his voice had lost its quaver. Covered by two revolvers, taken aback by the suddenness of surprise, the Germans were paralysed for a few moments. The major recovered himself first, and was opening his mouth to shout when Granger deftly slipped a table napkin between his teeth, drew it tight, and knotted it behind. From under the table he lifted several short pieces of cord, and in two minutes the infuriated officer was firmly bound to his chair.

Hellwig, meanwhile, whose face was the colour of the soldier's uniform, had sat limply watching Granger's quick and dexterous movements. He was dealt with in his turn.

"Call the sergeant in," said Granger to Kenneth.

The man came at the summons, found himself looking down the muzzles of two revolvers as he entered at the door, and was soon sitting between the others, the third guest at an empty board.

The distant sound of trotting horses drew the captors hurriedly to the window, and brought a gleam of hope into the captives' eyes.

"Cavalry, by all the powers!" Granger ejaculated, glancing up the road. "They are sure to visit the house. We have three men still to deal with, and three minutes for the job. The bold simple course, Amory! You must tackle them. Saunter out, don't hurry."

Kenneth, followed by Pariset, walked slowly towards the waiting car. The three men in it stared in surprise.

"We arrived this morning," said Kenneth in an easy tone to the chauffeur,

"and ate the Herr Major's lunch--by mistake."

The men guffawed; the German soldier does not love his officers. This was a good joke.

"That's a nice little toy you have there," Kenneth went on, pointing to the machine gun. He stepped quickly into the car to look at it.

"It is forbidden," said the chauffeur, with an uneasy glance at the window. "Only the crew are allowed in the car."

"Yes, yes, one understands. Just a minute!"

Before the men could make up their minds to turn him out he had swung round the machine gun to cover them.

"Hands up!" he cried.

They laughed, thinking it a practical joke, until they saw Pariset covering them with his revolver.

"Hands up!" he repeated, imitating Kenneth's accent as well as he could.

But they recognised now that he was a foreigner, and seeing at this moment Granger dragging the helpless form of the important Herr Brinckmann down the steps they surrendered.

"Get down, and don't stir a step for your lives," Kenneth commanded. "Drop your arms."

Pariset kept guard over them while Granger bundled Hellwig into the car and Kenneth started the engine.

"I didn't like to leave Brinckmann behind," explained Granger smoothly as he squeezed himself into the seat beside Hellwig. "We are just in time."

Just as the helmets of the approaching troopers showed above the park wall a furlong away, Kenneth sprang after Pariset into the car, and let in the clutch. The car moved forward, swung round into the drive, shaved the gatepost, and sped northward down the road.

CHAPTER XVIII--RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

The sound of the starting car brought two of the troopers up at a gallop. The sight of the Uhlan helmets did not at first inspire them with distrust, but merely with curiosity that Uhlans should have been employed in unusual work. The three men left in front of the house, however, came running to the gates, shouting somewhat incoherently. The words "Spionen!" and "Belgen!" were distinguishable. Their cries were taken up by the troopers, and vociferated to their comrades riding leisurely along. At the prospect of a spy hunt they pricked their horses to a gallop, and set off in chase of the car, now almost out of sight.

"The German camp is in this direction, you told us?" said Kenneth to Granger.

"Yes; there is a by-road just before we reach it. The enemy are not likely to be coming towards us."

The road was heavy and deeply rutted from the recent passage of cumbrous transport wagons and artillery. Kenneth found the acceleration of the car slow, and in any case the weight of the armour with which its vital parts were protected would have rendered it incapable of high speed. For a time the horsemen appeared to gain on it, and Pariset, who had taken charge of the machine gun, swung it round to cover the rear, ready to open fire if they drew too near.

"Don't fire if you can help it," Granger said. "It would be a pity to disturb the camp ahead."

After a few minutes the car began to draw away. Pariset saw one of the troopers rein up, and expected him to fire over the holster of his saddle. But the man dismounted, and just as the car swung out of sight at a bend of the road, he was clambering up a telegraph pole. Pariset hurriedly informed his friends.

"We must stop and cut the wires," said Kenneth, jamming on the brakes.

Lifting the lid of the tool box, he seized a pair of nippers.

"Evidently meant for the job," he said.

"Give them to me," cried Granger. "You stick to the car."

He sprang out, and swarmed up the nearest pole with an agility surprising in a man of his venerable aspect. Before he was half way up, however, the head of the column rounded the corner.

"There's no help for it," said Pariset. "Here goes!"

Next moment there was a sharp metallic crack. The car trembled.

"Three horses down!" cried Pariset. "The rest are swinging in to the side of the road. If Granger is quick--ah! he has done it. They are not coming on again yet."

Granger slid down the pole, jumped into the car, and again they were off.

"We shall have to cut it again in another mile or so," said Pariset.

"If we don't meet the enemy before then," rejoined Granger. "Or we can pretend we are chased by Belgians and dash through."

But in less than a mile they found that the wires left the road and ran across country.

"We can't navigate fields of stubble," said Kenneth. "The only thing to be done is to go ahead at full speed, and trust to luck. Let's hope that before any message they send can take effect we shall have reached that by-road. Where does it lead to?"

"To Durbuy, I think," said Granger. "There's a bridge across the Ourthe. The Germans may be there; they move so confoundedly fast; but that's our only chance of reaching the Belgian lines."

In a few minutes they reached the by-road to the left. It was narrow, but, to Kenneth's joy, not so deeply rutted as the main road. He was getting the utmost out of the car, which thundered along at forty miles an hour, the engine knocking furiously whenever it was called upon to breast an incline.

For some distance they neither met nor passed any traffic. When at last they overtook an empty farm cart, the driver had barely time or space to draw into the side to avoid them. A few yards further on in rounding a curve Kenneth saw a heavy motor transport wagon ahead, going in the same direction. At the sound of the horn the driver looked round, and seeing the armoured car manned apparently by Uhlans he drew in hastily to the bank, no doubt supposing that it was engaged in urgent work. Kenneth slowed down slightly to avoid a collision, scraped past, then raced on as before.

In less than half a minute afterwards he gave a cry of dismay. At the foot of a short hill two heavily laden carts were drawn full across the road. Kenneth jammed on the brakes, foot and hand; Granger, rendered suspicious by the position of the carts and the absence of horses, stood up and in a moment shouted to Pariset, his voice rising above the groaning and shrieking of the mechanism.

"Germans in bushes!"

Pariset had seen them almost as soon as Granger. Before the car had come to a standstill within a dozen yards of the obstruction, the machine gun began to spit bullets in reply to the fusillade that rattled on the armoured sides of the car and the shield of the gun. A few seconds of brisk firing; then the deadly hail from the machine gun crashing through the foliage into the ranks of the ambuscaders made their position hopelessly untenable, and a remnant of the Horse Grenadiers who had lain in hiding there fled helter skelter over the adjacent fields.

The three men sprang out of the car, and tried to drag the carts out of the way. They failed to move them, and Granger discovered that they were chained together.

"A hammer!" he cried.

But the hammer snatched from the toolbox proved useless. The links of the chain had been flattened by some heavy instrument. After repeated blows it was evident that the chain was unbreakable.

"What on earth is to be done?" cried Kenneth, looking helplessly at the carts, while Pariset and Granger kept on the watch for any sign of the enemy returning. A shot from the machine gun would probably be ineffective, even at short range; the bullet would hardly dent the chain, much less shatter it and release the carts.

At this critical moment the transport wagon which they had passed some way back appeared on the crest of the hill behind them, and sounded its horn. Kenneth had a flash of inspiration.

"Look out for the Grenadiers, Remi," he cried. "There's no sign of them, but they may come back. If they do, turn the gun on to them."

"What are you going to do?" shouted Pariset, as Kenneth ran up the incline towards the halted wagon.

"Commandeer the wagon for a battering ram. There's apparently no escort. Back the car well away to the right."

Reaching the wagon, he said to the driver:

"The rascally enemy has blocked the road, as you see. The carts there are chained together. Get out, quickly!"

The three infantrymen in the wagon were obviously amazed, not so much at being ordered about by a Uhlan, as at the apparent purposelessness of the command. They got out, however, and were still more astonished when the masterful Uhlan mounted into their place, and after a glance at the car below, released the brakes, let in the clutch, and sent the wagon lumbering down the hill. For a few seconds, while the vehicle was gathering speed, Kenneth steered straight; then, turning the wheel so as to give a slight tendency to the left, he sprang off, fell sprawling, jumped up and ran after the wagon, watching its course eagerly.

On it thundered, every moment faster. Would it reach the foot of the hill, or swerve into the bank on the left? On, and on--and then, at a speed of twenty

miles an hour, it struck the left-hand cart with a terrific crash, and threw both cart and itself in a pile of wreckage up the bank and into the field beyond. The chain connecting the carts had snapped like rotten cord.

[image]

CLEARING THE ROAD

"Bravo!" shouted the two men waiting beside the motor-car.

Rushing forward, they helped Kenneth to draw the released cart to one side, leaving a clear space between it and the wreckage. Then they leapt into the car, waved their hands to the astonished motormen above, and started forward towards Durbuy and safety.

"We are all right now--unless the Germans are in greater force than I believe," said Granger, taking a map from his pocket. "If we can cross the river at Durbuy, we can run due west to Dinant, where we shall probably find the Belgian, or maybe the French lines. Then we can swing northwards, and get to headquarters somewhere between Tirlemont and Brussels."

A run of a few miles brought them within sight of the river winding away to the east, and the little town--a mere village in point of size--of Durbuy. But here they perceived with dismay that the course they had planned was not feasible. Along the road between Barvaux and Durbuy a large German force was on the march. Their leading companies were already crossing the quaint old bridge, covered by troops of Hussars on both banks.

"Pull up," said Granger. "We shall have to go back and make a round. News of us has no doubt been flashed by this time to every German force in the neighbourhood."

Kenneth was backing the car when Granger noticed signs of movement among the cavalry on the near bank. A squadron formed up, faced towards the slight hill, and started at a canter in the direction of the car.

"There's no time to lose," cried Granger. "Reverse and turn round."

But at that moment Kenneth observed, just ahead, a narrow road running east for a few yards, then curving to the north.

"Better try and cut across them," he said. "If we go back we may run into another lot and be caught between two fires."

"Very well. The road isn't marked on my map, but we'll chance it."

Kenneth had already brought the gear lever from reverse to first. He let in the clutch; the car started forward again, and before the advancing horsemen were half way up the hill the fugitives swung round into the by-road. When the

Hussars reached the turning the car was two or three hundred yards ahead and rounding the curve.

"I'm afraid we've done for ourselves," said Kenneth ruefully. "The road is awful."

It was indeed scarred with deep ruts, almost like the furrows in a ploughed field, and thick with mud from the recent rain. The car swayed violently, jumping in and out of the ruts. In spite of its powerful build, Kenneth doubted whether the axles and springs would stand the strain. The wheels, moreover, sank so deep into the mud that the speed of the car fell away to what seemed to the occupants little more than a crawl.

The Hussars were galloping hotly after them. Some were deploying across the open fields on both sides of the road, to gain time at the windings of the latter. The distance between car and horsemen was steadily lessening; it seemed that for once muscle was about to conquer mechanism.

Kenneth was wholly occupied with the steering of the car. Pariset kept his eyes fixed on the pursuers. They were about fifty in number, at a distance no match for the machine gun, but if they were allowed to close up, especially if they got ahead, the occupants of the car would be at their mercy in the event of any sudden check. He watched for a favourable moment for bringing the gun into play.

After innumerable short windings the road ran straight for a considerable distance. The leading horsemen, now within a hundred yards of the car, began to fire as they rode. Pariset instantly replied, working the gun in a long arc from left to right. It was not for nothing that the German staff had made the machine gun one of the predominant features of their armament. Under the pitiless hail of bullets horses and men went down like grass under the scythe. The Hussars behind slowed down, allowing the car to increase its lead, but still keeping it in view, hoping no doubt that an accident, an obstacle, a piece of clumsy steering, would bring its career to an end. They might then close upon it and surround it without having to face that terrible machine gun again. Pariset, for his part, anxious not to attract the attention of any enemies who might be ahead, ceased fire as soon as the pursuit slackened.

Their direction was towards Liége. Now and then they caught sight of the Ourthe, winding below them on their left, but there was no sign of a bridge. Mile after mile passed. The road was a continual up and down; on each side was a variegated landscape of meadows, richly wooded slopes and frowning cliffs. The sight of the railway crossing the river reminded Kenneth that they were approaching the scene of their exploit; but Pariset had no eyes for anything but the helmets of the Uhlans bobbing up and down on the road far behind.

Presently they dashed past a battalion of infantry marching in the same

direction. The men all looked dead tired, and took little or no notice of the car as it passed at increased speed. A few minutes later they skirted the chateau of Hamoir, then ascended a steep hill, the engine knocking alarmingly, and rushing through the village of Louveigne suddenly came in sight of an immense military encampment. Far to left and right of the road stretched the lines of the Germans encircling Liége. Tents, carts, caissons, batteries of artillery, men on horse and on foot extended as far as the eye could reach.

But there was no sign of active operations. Troops were drilling on open spaces, practising the ridiculous goose-step; men off duty were strolling about. Smoke ascended from innumerable travelling kitchens. Horsemen were riding this way and that: a motor cyclist was dashing away to the east.

When this spectacle flashed upon the view, Kenneth slowed down. His face was pale.

"Push through and trust to luck?" he said to Granger at his side.

"There's nothing else for it, with pursuers hot on our track," replied Granger. "Speed about ten miles, but be ready to let her out."

They went on. Curious glances were thrown at them by troops of cavalry off-saddled by the roadside. Uhlans in an armoured car! They must be on special service. With his heart in his mouth Kenneth followed the road for a full mile through the lines. The country became clearer of men as they proceeded, but as Kenneth was again increasing speed he noticed a strong force of infantry posted ahead of them at some distance to the right of the road.

"They are supports," said Pariset. "We shall find a battery ahead."

In less than two miles they came to a number of ammunition and transport wagons, parked in the rear of a battery of six guns. A patrol on the road signalled to them to halt. Kenneth pulled up, but before the sergeant could address him, he asked urgently:

"Where is the commandant? Quick! I haven't a minute to lose."

The man pointed to a spot about half a mile in front. Kenneth, without waiting for more, opened out, and the car quickly gained speed.

"It's touch and go now," he said, almost in a whisper.

"The guns are unlimbered for action," said Pariset. "If we pass they'll know we are enemies."

"Nothing else for it," replied Kenneth, setting his teeth. "We must trust to our speed. Keep a look-out, Granger."

Thenceforth he concentrated all his attention upon the car. It sped on, crossed a small bridge over a rivulet, and swept up a short hill on the near side of which six guns were emplaced.

"Eight inchers," murmured Granger. He had his eye fixed on the officer who had been pointed out as the commandant, and who, at this moment, was listening

at the receiver of a field telephone. As the car approached he dropped the receiver and gave an order. The soldier next him ran towards the guns, shouting to the artillerymen, who appeared to be laying their weapons.

"The game is up!" said Granger. "He's had word of us. Press her, Amory."

Kenneth opened the throttle to the utmost, and the car leapt forward like a living thing. It dashed past the commandant, past the group of gunners, topped the rise, and thundered down the slope beyond. A few revolver shots rattled on the armour.

"We're safe for a little, while they alter the range," said Granger, assuring himself at a glance that no one had been hit.

The car was now running at a furious pace, the road having recently been repaired, no doubt for the easier passage of the guns. Kenneth knew that he was directly in the line of fire of the battery. On his left wound the Ourthe, with the railway almost parallel with it beyond; and as the car rushed between two clumps of woodland Pariset called over his shoulder that he had just caught sight of Fort de Boncelles, two or three miles to the west, and Fort d'Embourg a little nearer to the east.

"Which shall we make for?" gasped Kenneth.

"Boncelles," replied Granger. "It is nearer the French lines. We can cross by the iron bridge just below Tilff."

On they went. Second after second passed; a minute, two minutes. They swept round to the left towards the bridge. There was still no shot from the guns.

"They were trained on Boncelles," said Granger. "We are too near them still."

He had scarcely spoken when there was a moaning in the air, followed instantly by a roar and crash, and a thick cloud of black smoke sprang up some four hundred yards to the right. They all crouched low in the car, which dashed across the throbbing bridge at forty miles an hour. Another shell plunged into the river, a third struck the road a few yards behind them, as they entered the railway arch, bespattering them with earth. No sooner had they emerged on the other side than still another shell burst ahead of them, in the field beside the road. They all caught their breath: if it had fallen a few yards to the right, it would have dug a hole large enough to engulf the car.

Shells now began to explode, as it seemed, all around them. The sky was darkened by the smoke, poisonous fumes almost choked them. Only the great speed of the car and the slight changes in its direction due to the windings of the road preserved them from annihilation. The thought that flashed through Pariset's mind was that if the Germans had used shrapnel instead of shell they must almost certainly have been destroyed, for he could not doubt that the whole battery was now playing upon them.

With shells hurtling around at intervals of a few seconds Kenneth, so intent

upon his work as to be scarcely conscious of them, steered the car up the road, taking the curves at a pace that would have made his hair stand on end at less critical times. It almost seemed that he and his companions had charmed lives. At moments, as the road wound, the fort came in sight beyond the ruined village--burnt by the Belgians to clear their line of fire. Would they reach it in safety? The nearer they approached it, the greater their danger. The gunners had the range of the fort; a shell falling short even by a few yards might strike the car at the very moment when escape seemed sure.

"Only half a mile more!" Pariset said, in a hoarse whisper from his parched lips.

Two seconds afterwards there was a stunning report and a blinding flash, apparently from beneath the car. It spun round and round like a teetotum, then fell over to one side with a crash.

For a few moments the three men were too much shaken to move. In the consciousness of them all those moments were a blank. They lay on the roadside where they had been thrown, like dead men. Then they realised with a shock of surprise that they were alive. Pariset was up first. Before he had time to stagger to the others, Kenneth sprang to his feet. Granger moved more slowly, and when he too stood erect, it was seen that his false beard was gone.

"I feel cold," he said, touching his chin, and smiling, though he was pale as death.

They glanced at the car. The off front wheel had disappeared; the off hind wheel was buckled; the bonnet and radiator were a mass of twisted iron. It was a complete wreck.

A shell bursting little more than a hundred yards away warned them to be gone, and they started to run towards the fort.

"Hellwig!" exclaimed Kenneth suddenly.

They ran back. The spy, the man whom the Kaiser delighted to honour, lay huddled in the bottom of the car, under the machine gun. It had broken his neck.

"Poor devil!" murmured Granger.

They turned hastily, and ran on silently, each thinking his own thoughts. Pariset was the least concerned at Hellwig's fate. To him Hellwig was merely a German and a spy, who had met with his deserts. Granger, whatever his private animus against Hellwig, could not but remember that they were members of one profession, who faced the same perils and might suffer the same end. Kenneth was the most deeply affected. He had disliked Hellwig, and had the average Englishman's contempt and hatred of spying. It was the one thing that alloyed his liking for Granger. But, as he said to Pariset afterwards:

"If there must be spying, and I suppose there must, it is something to spy like a gentleman, and that I am sure Granger does."

The three men came to the glacis. A roar startled them and made them duck instinctively. The fort had opened fire on the German battery. They raced up, past empty trenches, still followed by shell; but they now presented an inconspicuous mark to the gunners more than three miles distant. It was a long uphill climb, but they panted on towards the door of safety.

Was it safety? Their way across the moat was barred by a group of Belgian engineers with rifles, amazed at the appearance of two men in Uhlan uniform. Pariset held up his hands.

"Lieutenant Montoisy!" he shouted. "Is he here?"

The men lowered their rifles and advanced. Pariset hastened to meet them.

"We are friends," he said. "Tell Lieutenant Montoisy that Lieutenant Pariset is here."

One of the men ran back. A shell burst on the wall some distance to the right.

"Come inside, messieurs," said another of the men.

And as they entered, Lieutenant Montoisy, the second in command, a begrimed haggard figure, met them.

"Pariset!" he exclaimed. "You were in the car? Mon Dieu! You have had an escape! Come in: what is the meaning of it?"

CHAPTER XIX--'A LONG, LONG WAY----'

No sooner had the fugitives entered the fort than Kenneth collapsed. The tension of the last two days, the terrific strain of controlling the armoured car, and the concussion of the final shock, had been too heavy a tax upon his nervous system. Pariset was in little better condition. Granger, an older man, of settled constitution, was less affected than the others, and he was able to assist the surgeon of the fort in tending upon his friends.

Much to their surprise, the interior of the fort was quiet and peaceful. The German batteries had ceased fire, the fort guns were silent. Lieutenant Montoisy explained that during the past few days there had been no attack. The enemy's

infantry, shattered by fire from the trenches in their frontal assaults, had retired. The bombardment had been feeble.

"We can hold out for weeks," said the lieutenant.

"Don't buoy yourself with false hopes," said Granger. "The Germans are only waiting until they bring up their great guns. There are several monsters of 42 centimetre calibre on their way. They will bring them through Liége; as soon as they can place them the fort will be shivered to atoms."

"Bah! Our cupolas will stand anything. Besides, no one has ever heard of these great guns. They are probably a myth, invented to frighten us."

"These gentlemen know better than that," Granger returned. "You had better tell what you saw, Amory."

Kenneth related the incident near Erkelenz.

"Unluckily we only destroyed the parts of one gun," he concluded. "The block on the road had evidently caused them to send on the others by another route."

Lieutenant Montoisy was still sceptical of the effect these guns could produce. He led the three men round the fort. It was triangular in shape, with guns in disappearing turrets at each corner. In the centre was a steel turret armed with two 6-inch howitzers, enclosed in a square with four similar turrets carrying 5-inch quick-firing guns. The turrets were embedded in a solid block of concrete, and here and there were machine guns and searchlight apparatus. The heaviest guns were mounted on a steel cupola, capable of being raised and lowered. Impressed by the immense strength of the defences, the Englishmen began to share Montoisy's confidence in their power to withstand bombardment even by the heaviest artillery.

"Why aren't our men in the trenches?" asked Pariset.

"They were ordered to withdraw several days ago," replied Montoisy. "You see, we had only 40,000 men to defend a circuit of thirty-three miles--impossible against a quarter of a million Germans. But we have taught them a lesson. We have cut whole regiments to pieces. Our gallant Garde Civique made a bayonet charge the other day that sent them helter-skelter just beyond Boncelles yonder. No one will ever again regard the bosches as invincible."

Bit by bit he drew from Pariset the story of his adventures, and when it spread among the garrison, the two young men found themselves regarded as heroes by all, from the commandant downwards.

Their future movements were discussed. It was decided that they should remain in the fort for a few days until they had recovered their strength, and then make their way westward if possible to the Belgian lines. Granger determined to leave at once. Expert in disguises, he transformed himself into a Belgian peasant, and waited for nightfall to steal away towards Liége.

"We may meet again; we may not," he said, as he shook hands. "I hope we may. It will be a long war. We shall win. And if we three lose our lives--well, who was it said that death is the portal to the life Elysian? But I won't moralise. We'll stick it out. Good-bye!" and smiling serenely he went out into the night.

Pariset was eager to know what was happening in other parts of the vast battlefield, and in particular whether anything had been heard of General Leman. Montoisy explained that, the telephone communications having recently been smashed, the fort was cut off as completely as if it were a desolate island in the midst of an ocean.

Next evening, about six o'clock, two shrapnel shells burst harmlessly over the fort. A few minutes later an acute buzzing was heard in the air, then there was a thunderous roar, the whole place trembled, and the outer slope of the fort was smothered in a cloud of stones, dust, and black smoke. Montoisy looked grave, and hurried to the arcade under which the commandant was sheltering. As he stood talking with him, a shell which, judging from its size, weighed nearly a ton burst near by, bringing down a shower of shattered masonry, and wounding the commandant.

"Close the cupola," he signalled. "Every man take shelter."

Montoisy tried in vain to locate the enormous guns which had started on their fell work. They could not be seen. To fire at them was impossible. That they had so soon been got into position seemed to show that their concrete emplacements had been prepared long before.

For two hours the helpless garrison crouched in their shelters, hearing the roar of the guns, the crashing of masonry and the splintering of steel, almost choked by the noisome gases emitted by the bursting shells. The smashing of the dynamo plunged them into pitch darkness; and all the while, outside, the western sky glowed with the rich hues of a peaceful sunset.

At eight o'clock the bombardment ceased, and the Belgians, venturing forth from their subterranean lairs, looked out upon a scene of devastation. The slopes and counterslopes were a chaos of rubbish: it was as if an earthquake had shaken the foundations of the globe. Great chasms yawned; tongues of flame shot up from where one of the cupolas had been; shapeless shreds of armour plate lay amid jagged masses of masonry and heaps of stones. No trace of the guns was to be seen.

Far down the slope two German officers were advancing under a white flag. Coming within hailing distance they called on the garrison to surrender.

"You have seen what our guns can do," said one of them in French. "You have been struck by 278 shells; you cannot reply; and we have still more colossal guns in reserve. Surrender, or you will be annihilated."

The commandant, wounded as he was, half choked by the foul gases that

still clung about the place, stepped forward and gave his answer.

"Honour forbids us to surrender: we shall resist to the end."

The garrison waved their caps and cheered. A nation whose stricken soldiers showed such a spirit could never be quelled, thought Kenneth. The Germans laughed and withdrew. In half an hour the bombardment recommenced, this time from two directions. The men in their galleries listened helplessly to the destruction of their world.

Darkness fell, and except for an occasional shot the bombardment ceased. The commandant sent for Pariset.

"It is useless," he said wearily. "Their shells will pierce the galleries to-morrow. One of my men has already had his hand blown off; others are seriously wounded. To-night I shall flood the magazines and break all the rifles and guns; in the morning I must surrender. But you and your friend are not of my garrison: there is work for you outside; why should you be carried prisoners to Germany? Slip out in the darkness. There are no infantry around the fort. I can provide you with civilian dress. It will be dangerous to attempt to get into Liége. Make for Seraing, cross the river there, and slip between the Flemalle and Hollogne forts towards Brussels. And tell General Wonters that we held out until resistance was hopeless."

Towards midnight the two friends in peasant costume slipped out of the rear of the fort, and taking the stars as their guide trudged through the fields and woods and up the hill into the deserted streets of Seraing. The great iron-foundries were silent; no glare from the furnaces lit the sky.

"Belgium is paying a heavy price," thought Kenneth.

They crossed the silent bridge in the moonlight, crossed the Namur road and the railway beyond, and had just reached the road leading through Waremme and Louvain to Brussels when the sound of voices on their right caused them to shrink back behind a hedge. Peering out they saw a patrol of some twenty-five Uhlans riding past at a foot pace.

"We shall have to go across the fields," whispered Pariset, when the horsemen had gone by. "We dare not pass them. This means a general advance to-morrow. The bosches lose no time."

They struck across the fields to the south of their true course, and plodded on, more or less at a venture. Turning by and by into a lane, they almost collided with a cyclist, who, swerving to avoid them, skidded on the wet track, and fell to the ground. The sinking moon shed just enough light for them to distinguish a French uniform, and they ran forward to assist the fallen man, Pariset speaking to him in French.

"Ah! You are French?" said the cyclist, springing to his feet and raising his bicycle.

"Belgian and English, monsieur," Pariset answered. "You are a scout?"

"Yes; a troop of Chasseurs are a mile or two south. Have you seen anything of the enemy?"

"A number of Uhlans are riding up the Waremme road."

"How many?"

"Twenty-five or so."

"Are they riding fast?"

"No; at a walking pace."

"Then we will capture them. I will ride on to the road and keep my eye on them. You hurry along the lane and tell our men to hurry. There is no time to be lost."

Willing enough to do something, even at this last moment, for the common cause, Kenneth and Pariset hurried along the lane. In the course of a quarter of an hour they met the Chasseurs. Pariset gave the message, and on explaining that he was a Belgian officer and knew the country well was invited to mount behind the captain and act as guide. Kenneth sprang up behind a trooper, and they set off at a trot, riding across the fields in order not to be heard.

Presently they heard, in the distance, a revolver shot. Immediately afterwards came the crack of carbines. Quickening their pace, they galloped in the direction of the sounds, expecting to find that the scout had been killed.

At Pariset's instructions, they rode in a north-westerly direction, so as to strike the Waremme road some miles west of the spot where he and Kenneth had seen the Uhlans. The firing continued; the sound of the single revolver was clearly distinguishable from the reports of the carbines. Wondering what was happening, they came suddenly upon a remarkable scene.

Dawn was stealing over the country. At a turn of the road, the cyclist was standing behind a tree, resting his revolver against the trunk. No one was in sight at the moment, but just as the Chasseurs, who had now reduced their pace to a walk, came up behind the cyclist, he fired his revolver at a Uhlan who had edged round the corner.

The Chasseur captain took in the situation at a glance. Whispering to Pariset and Kenneth to get down, he gave his men the order to charge. With a wild cry they dashed forward, swept round the bend, and fell upon the Uhlans, grouped indecisively at the side of the road. There was a brisk fight, lasting half a minute. Ten of the Uhlans were killed or wounded, the rest flung down their arms and surrendered.

"Many thanks, messieurs," the cyclist was saying to Pariset and Kenneth. "I was afraid they would not be up in time. But they are a timid lot, these bosches."

It appeared that, not content with merely watching the Uhlans, he had conceived the bold notion of holding them up until the Chasseurs arrived.

The Chasseurs returned with their prisoners towards their own lines. The captain had invited Pariset to accompany them, but Pariset decided, tired though he was, to continue his course towards Brussels. With Kenneth, he plodded along the road, and an hour later they were challenged by Belgian outposts at Waremme. They were too fatigued to enter into explanations at once, and sought shelter in a cottage, where they slept until the sun was high. And when they awoke and went into the village street, they found the people streaming westward, in carts, on foot, carrying what they could of their household gear. Fort Boncelles had surrendered.

Seeking the colonel of the nearest regiment, they told him what they had seen in the fort. He had just heard by telephone that Fort Loncin also had surrendered that morning, and General Leman was a prisoner.

They begged a lift in a farmer's cart, and in the evening reached Brussels, where they found an asylum with a friend of Pariset's. There they remained for a few days, recuperating after the strain which, scarcely noticed while they were in action, had told heavily upon them both. Every day they heard of fresh advances of the Teuton hordes, of gallant deeds by the sorely tried little army of Belgium. Every day they saw pallid, nerve-shaken, wounded refugees flocking in from Tirlemont and other places desolated by German shot and shell.

Pariset was much depressed.

"We shall cease to exist," he said one day. "The brutes will destroy us all. They are ruthless. They are fiends. What have we done that we should suffer so?"

"Cheer up, old man," said Kenneth. "Look here! 'Gallant little Belgium!'" He pointed to the headline of an article in an English newspaper. "You might have chosen the easy course; you didn't, and the whole world admires you."

"But that won't save us."

"No, but you've saved France. You've thrown the German war machine out of gear, and I bet you you've smashed their chances. Lord Kitchener is raising a great army. The Kaiser scoffs at our men; he'll sing a different tune some day. I'm going home, Remi, going to join Kitchener's army. Sorry to leave you, old man, but we'll meet again, never fear, perhaps soon, perhaps not until British, French and Belgians meet the Russians in Berlin. And when the war is over, you may be sure that gallant little Belgium will rise like the phoenix, and grow stronger and more prosperous than ever."

————

Four days later Kenneth was in London. He found awaiting him at home a bulky envelope addressed in a strange hand, the postmark Amsterdam. Opening it, he took out two letters, dated a week back, and posted in Königsborn. One was in

the handwriting of Max Finkelstein, the other in the large round hand of Frieda.

> "I hope this will reach you," the former wrote. "I am sending it through my friend Vandermond. After a few days' detention as a spy, I was released for want of evidence, and as business is absolutely dead, we have come to Königsborn, where we shall rusticate and pinch until this dreadful war is over. We hear all sorts of tales, and the credence paid them by otherwise intelligent people makes me think that we as a nation have a good deal to learn. One extraordinary story, by the way, will amuse you. It was rumoured in Cologne that a French airman had run off with one of our Taubes, a feat which you, knowing Cologne, will recognise as impossible. I believe it as little as I believe that the Irish are in revolt.
>
> "I am glad for our sake that recruiting is a failure in England. People here are very bitter against the English, but I explain that you have been hoodwinked by those awful Russians. Your statesmen are so easily taken in. After the war your people will admit it.
>
> "Keep the London business together as well as you can. Next year I dare say I shall settle in London myself, and nothing shall interfere with our plans for a partnership. Write to me if you can."

————

"Poor old Max!" thought Kenneth. "Of course, like all Germans, he thinks they will win: professors and the General Staff have drummed that into their foolish heads. He'll have a shock when I tell him I have joined the army. Now for Frieda."

————

"Was it you?" he read. "I daren't suggest it to Father; he scoffs at the mere idea that any one could do so audacious a thing. But when you didn't come back for your luggage I was anxious and went down to the station, and the stationmaster told me that you had gone away with your ticket and hadn't come for your seat that he had engaged for you, and when I heard the rumour about the French airman I couldn't help thinking it was just the mad sort of thing you would delight in. Do tell me if I am right.

"This is a terrible war, isn't it? What is the good of you English fighting? Father says your army is too small to do anything, and you can't get recruits because all your young men want to play football. I am so sorry for you. Father says you will give it up when we take Paris, and then you will have to give us

some of your colonies. You have so many that I am sure you can spare some.

"We shall very likely come to London next year, Father says. We shall always be friends, you and I, shan't we?

"We haven't seen anything of Kurt Hellwig lately. You don't think I grieve?"

————

"It's amazing!" said Kenneth to himself. "I thought Frieda would have known better. She would laugh, I suppose, if I told her that I am likely to be in Berlin before she comes to London."

But Kenneth Amory was to go through many adventures, before he met Remi Pariset in Berlin.

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